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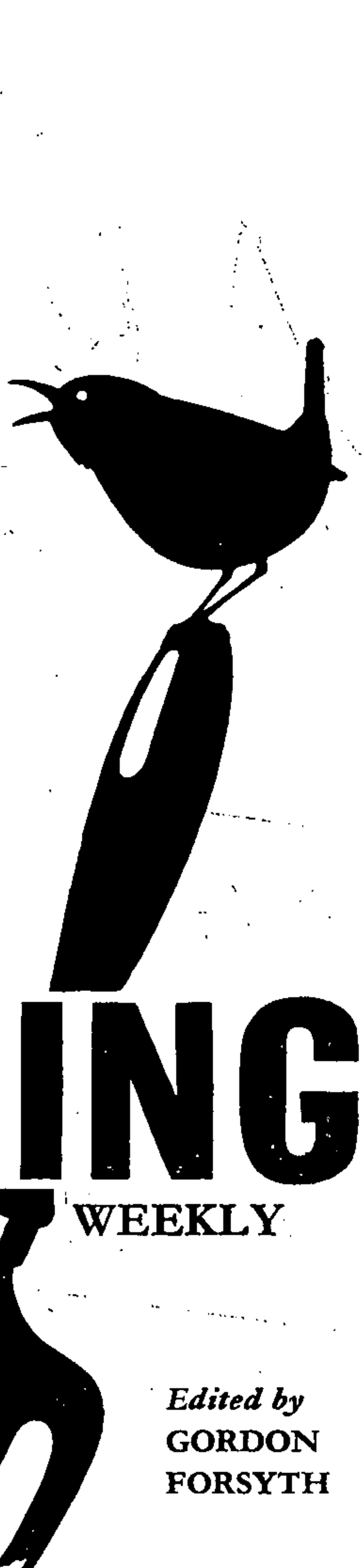

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

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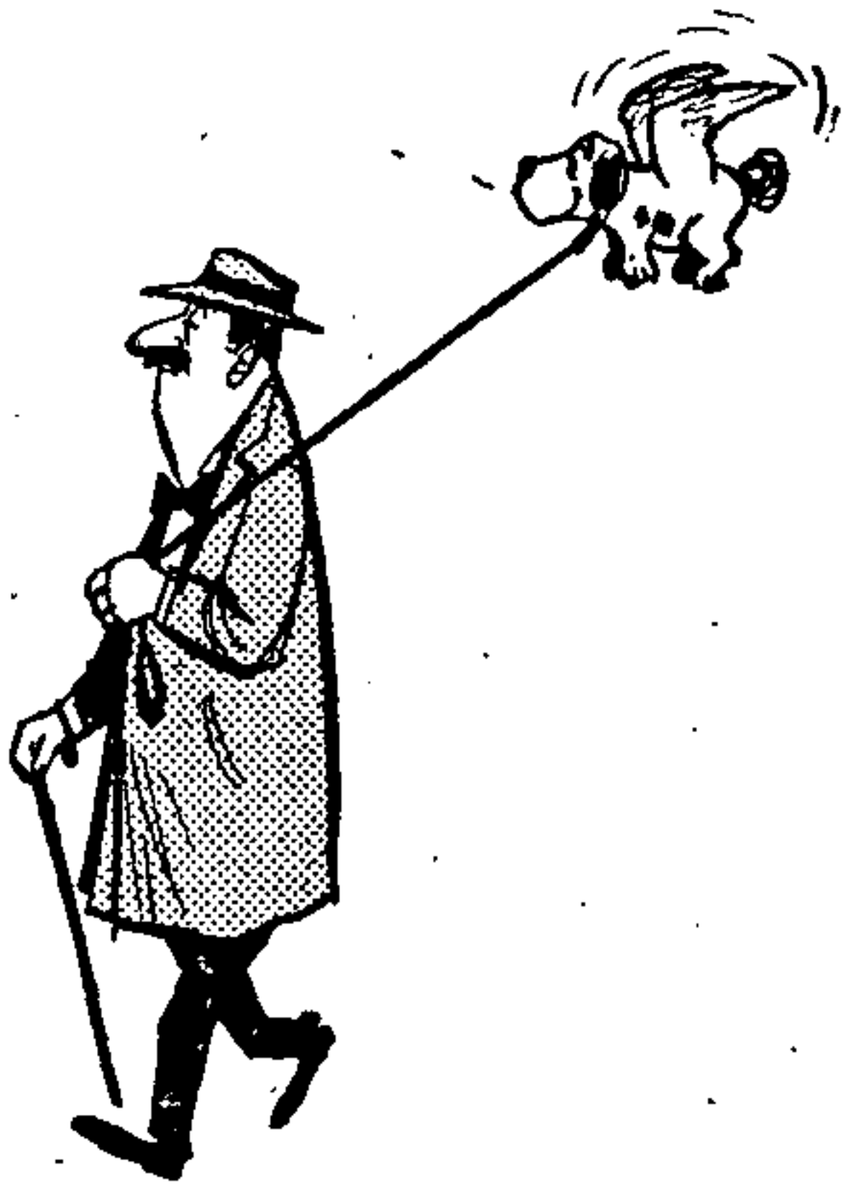


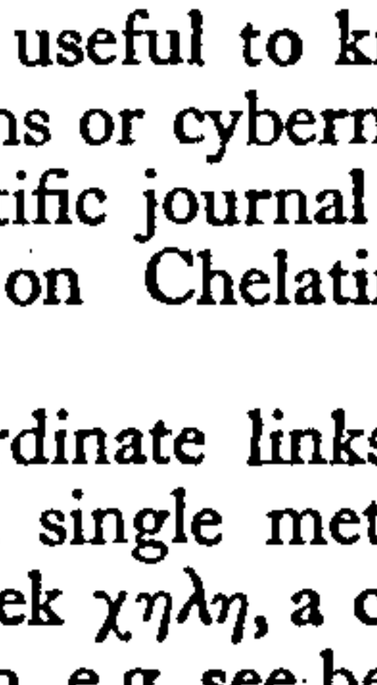
Log Book

POPULAR science is all the thing now, of course; gay and simple scientific weeklies, addressed to the mass mind, beckon on every bookstall, and from time to time we buy one of them, feeling that in a crisis it might be useful to know something, just one little thing, about cyclotrons or cybernetics. But it's uphill work. The last popular scientific journal we looked at contained, for instance, an article on Chelating Agents embodying this information:

The attachment of two or more co-ordinate links from the same complexing molecule (ligand) to a single metal atom is usually known as chelation, from the Greek $\chi\eta\lambda\eta$, a crab's claw, expressive of the simplest form of chelation, e.g. see below:

Gosh darn it, is our reaction.

If this is the simplest form of chelation, give us one of the more complicated forms; our mind just isn't as mass as that.



However, Argosy, mindful as ever of readers' needs, has compiled its own roundup of recent advances in the scientific field, and we may even bring you further information from time to time, couched in terms adapted to the average vocabulary.

Firstly, Aerodynamics. University College, London, Department of Physiology, has come to the conclusion that dogs, preferably small ones, would be able to fly if they had wings, but that man would be too heavy. With our miserable muscle power, and supposing our wings to weigh no more than 90 lb:, flight would be so strenuous that we could only flap along for a few

minutes at a time, and would then have to glide, or perch somewhere to recuperate.

Females, God bless 'em, would do a bit better, but still it's going to produce a whole tiresome new set of parking problems. One query does raise itself in our pondering lay mind—why should those wings have to weigh 90 lb.? Over *six stone*? That's a devil of a lot for some sinews and feathers. However, it's pleasing to know that moderate-sized dogs could fly quite well, and, we confess, rather a relief to find that horses have to remain permanently grounded; they have too little horsepower for their weight.

Now, Work Study. A Royal Navy School devoted to this subject has discovered that during 22 minutes while a rating was scrubbing a passage, 468 men stepped over him, and that one ship's office contained sufficient official forms for 72 years.

Social Research. Following some experiments on the mental reactions of octopi in recognising shapes (octopi are particularly good at this game, as, indeed, they have to be in order not to offend their wives and families) a computer has been set up under the auspices of the Nuffield Foundation which may recognise human features and make a sound of greeting when a familiar face appears. It is going to be rather nice to come home to the House of the Future and hear one's wife say, " Oh, look, darling, the

machine's recognised you after only two days!" and see it wagging its red light and going dreep, dreep, dreep, clickety-dreep.

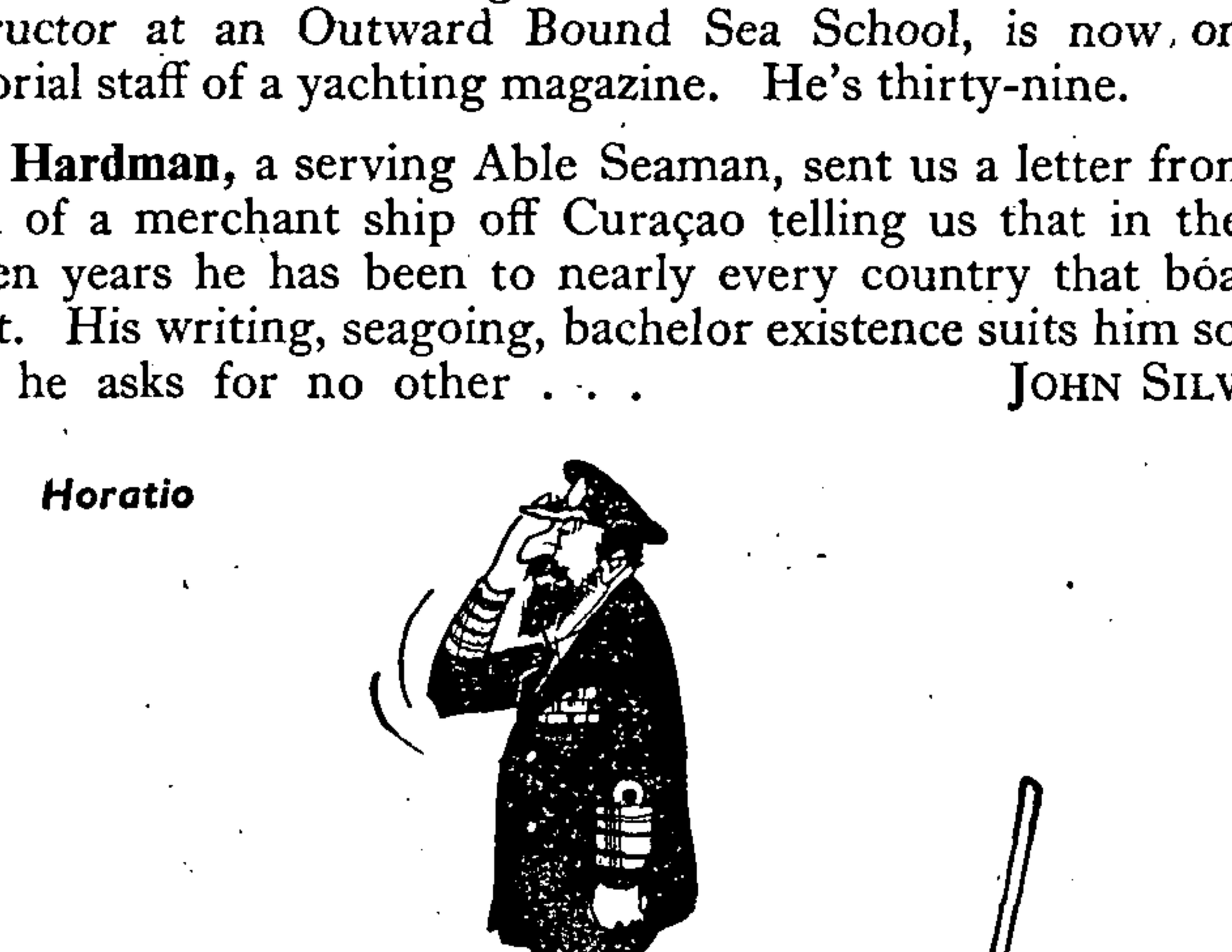
Lastly, Medical Research. The' National Institute for this subject is working on the use of pills containing tiny radio transmitters, which, when you swallow them, will be able to wander around in your intestines sending out messages. When we consider this revolutionary invention—but no, frankly; the idea's too nasty . . . Let us hastily leave the subject and turn instead to the feast that Argosy has to offer this month.

Evan Hunter, born and bred in New York, lives there still with his wife and three children. He taught for a time in a New York vocational High School, which inspired his terrifying first novel, *Blackboard Jungle,* later filmed. *A Matter of Conviction,* published last year, also deals with New York's teenage gangs.

D. Sleightholme, has had a varied working life always in, near, or connected with sailing boats. He has been seamanship instructor at an Outward Bound Sea School, is now on the editorial staff of a yachting magazine. He's thirty-nine.

Ken Hardman, a serving Able Seaman, sent us a letter from the deck of a merchant ship off Curaçao telling us that in the last fifteen years he has been to nearly every country that bóasts a coast. His writing, seagoing, bachelor existence suits him so well that he asks for no other . . . JOHN SILVER

Horatio



SKATE'S EYEBALL

It could loop the loop, roll,
dip, drop—and tailspin too

BY GERALD KERSH

IT WAS a notable criminal indeed that caused Karmesin to raise an eyebrow or twitch his moustache. Thus, when I said that a man called Carfax had never been caught, there occurred a certain convulsion in the features of Karmesin.

First, his eyebrows went up and his moustache came down, then his eyebrows levelled themselves and his moustache spread itself; he laughed. When Karmesin laughed, it was a sort of internecine incident—everything shook, yet he made little sound.

"Poor Carfax!" said Karmesin.

"Not so poor," I said. "Carfax got away with millions. Scotland Yard knows all about it—he fenced, fiddled, and organised. He rides about in an enormous limousine. Admit, Karmesin, that he must have made a couple of millions, and was never caught—"

"Never *what*? Never prosecuted, you mean," said Karmesin. "Neither was I. But *caught*, in the colloquial sense of the term? There I beg to differ."

Locking his enormous hands and glaring at me under his portentous eyebrows, making full play of his plum-like eyes, Karmesin went on, "Carfax's liquid assets were £2,530,700 in bullion, American dollars, and Swiss francs—I happen to know. But his fortune is gone, and his prestige is gone, and worst of all, he has lost face in his filthy milieu.

"Once upon a time, anyone who took a shilling off Carfax would be found at ebbtide in the Thames in the region of Greenwich, in an advanced state of decomposition. Now, he could not even get your arm broken. Well, I took a fortune off him as easily as—at least with less outcry than one might take a lollipop from a child. I'll tell you."

It was in the autumn of the year 1945 that my peregrinations took me to a certain London hotel not far from Hyde Park which was a most peculiar hangout of black marketeers, visiting film

stars, and all that. In wartime your black marketeers had tended to load and overload, now they felt certain misgivings. In the underworld it was a bull market today and a bear market tomorrow—an awkward time for a hard-working petty criminal or spiv to be operating.

To proceed: I was in the hotel bar, thinking my own thoughts and drinking a little glass of sound brandy, when there came to my nostrils—which are sensitive at the best of times—an unmistakable odour which I challenge the parfumiers of the world to reduplicate: the odour of a skate's eyeball.

In case you want to try it, put a pickled onion in neat Hollands gin and beer, and rinse and swallow. This, on the breath of a man who is afraid of dentists: work it out.

I lit a cigar and, without turning my head, said, "Carfax! Sit down. Stop breathing down my neck or I'll be compelled to go upstairs for a bath and a clean collar."

So Carfax sat down and offered a drink, but when I said that this was my table, and would he please order what he wanted—as if I did not know—he called for a wineglassful of Hollands gin, and produced from one of his pockets a little jar of pickled onions.

I said to him, "If you have anything to say to me, Carfax, turn your chair sideways and say it out of the other corner of your mouth." He did nothing of the sort.

Instead, he made me a kind of stream of consciousness, which ran somewhat as follows, "Karmesin, you're the one man in the world I'd cut my right hand orf to see. My left, also. Karmesin, I know the boys, I've known 'em since Eddie Guerin escaped from Dartmoor, but never no one I could trust. Of all the tealeafs I ever met, only you can work alone—"

Tealeaf, I need scarcely tell you, my young friend, is cant for thief. Try as he might, this fellow Carfax could not refrain from being offensive; everybody knows that I disapprove of slang.

However, keeping a smokescreen between myself and his skate's eyeball, I said nothing while Carfax went on, "Yes. There's the trouble with the wide boys—they got to have a pal. And believe me, Karmesin, it's been the downfall of too many. But sometimes a feller gets in a sort of jam; and it's then he needs a pal—for a consideration, mind you, for a consideration . . .

"Now look at me; I'm the boss, I'm like a king, but who can I trust? For the little jobs, sure, I got a decent bunch of boys. They'd swing for anybody I put the finger on, and never squeal! Much good it'd do them if they did, because the world is a little place, and—get what I mean—they wouldn't die of old age.

You can trust a bloke with your life, you can trust a bloke with your wife, but where will you find a bloke that you can trust with money?

"Believe me, a gentleman is bloody hard to find. I don't mean somebody that talks with his mouth full of hot potatoes like you, because they're two a penny—what I mean is, one o' *Nature*'s gentlemen, like me!"

"Perhaps," I said, "you think that it pays some dividends to put my legs under the same table with you? Listen, Carfax, I know that you can whistle up a mad-doggery of slashers; but I have not been afraid of the most desperate scum on earth from here to Marseilles, from Marseilles to Bucharest, from Bucharest to Hong Kong, and so on around the world.

"If threatened men live long, Mr. Carfax, I am assured of several hundred years of life." But he did not hear me.

He went on, "These Mayfair boys think they're gentlemen because they get their suits made in Savile Row. La-de-da! My boys, I outfitted 'em during the war by a tailor in Black Lion Yard; *he* made 'em a secret lining, and every one of 'em could carry clothing coupons, food coupons, and what not—and every one of 'em was dressed smart. To a point you can trust a man—say, 20,000 coupons at a couple of shillings apiece; deduct overheads, and it's only a matter of a few hundred pounds. Yes? All right.

"What are you looking at me like that for? What did I do wrong? You're an educated man— What's Economics? Taking advantage of a necessity, I believe; in other words, filling up a hole, that's Economics.

"You're a man of education, so I don't need to tell you the meaning of bureaucracy. I'm a victim of bureaucracy. I had an Organisation tight as a drum and a mob clean as a whistle, that's agreed. Comes something ten times tighter, calling cop—that's bureaucracy for you.

"It comes around to this, Karmesin, you daren't let anybody know what you got, because once you let him know you trust him with it.

"Now I've got as lovely a bunch of boys as you could meet within spitting distance on a dusty day; but I pay 'em by the job, and provide bail when necessary. Karmesin, they love me like a father.

"I taught 'em all they know. They are as ignorant as dirt. Play both ends against the middle is Carfax's lay.

"Every one of 'em watches the other like a cat watches a mouse. Get me?"

I said, "Yes, my friend. But where do you get off?"

Carfax said then, " Where do I get off? Why, I'll be frank with you—just about here. Now there's only two boys I can trust—my sons. If anything happens to me they inherit through their mother."

I said, " Be more specific, Carfax."

His voice was hoarse as he explained, " Look. I'll tell you because it's no secret, but since 1939 I stacked up a pile of the dosh, only I daren't bank it and I daren't invest it. For why? Why, the police of two continents couldn't put salt on *my* tail, but there's one outfit that'll wait day and night and never let anything blow over.

" Know who I mean? "

I said, " That would be the Department of Inland Revenue."

Carfax said, " Listen, Karmesin, I'm getting on in years, and in the middle of the night I get a feeling like something's pressing exactly where you give a man the boot—" he pointed to his solar plexus—" so the little bit I saved up, the actuaries are after. They're scratching, Karmesin, they're digging.

" You know I switched trucks and lifted half a million pounds in Bank of England bullion from the airport; shipped it to France and had it cast into genuine coins, which I shipped back.

" The overheads were something terrible, but *that* I got away with. Murder I can get away with—put it like this, dead men tell no tales. Ah, you can hide anything you like," he said, " except money.

" I daresay I could be hanged many times over and the police know it, but they can't make a case against me. I've been grilled off and on for the past forty years by the cops, in the days when they were free with their hands too, but I never came across anything so dastardly cruel as the actuaries.

" Kind of put yourself in my position. I've got a little bit o' property. Put yourself in my position."

Knowing with whom I was dealing, I said, " Before I offer an opinion, Mr. Carfax, I will thank you for a consultant's fee—one hundred pounds, in one-pound notes."

As I expected, he said, " I could run to twenty-five pounds."

Whereupon, to his infinite astonishment, I replied, " Very well, Carfax, very well."

Having put the money in my pocket, I summed up. " Carfax, that you are a most notorious and sickening son of a dog is common knowledge in heaven and on earth. If you think you fool me for one instant, you never made a greater mistake in your misspent life.

" You do not need to tell me the circumstances; I will tell you. I know you to be a fence of thirty or forty years standing,

and one of the ringleaders of the Black Market. But, friend Carfax, you were an exceedingly rich man long before the war brought the Yanks here. Only you were always a bully and a pig."

"Hold hard there, Karmesin! We've all got to fiddle a little. I mean to say, if I hadn't somebody else would've."

"I believe, Carfax, that I can foresee your every intention. What do you take me for? The little boy you pushed through the fanlight of a bank window and rewarded with a few pieces of silver?"

"The kid done it of his own free will," said Carfax.

"After you had shown him a razor. Sir, I am no such child. As I calculate, you must have accumulated—you were always a mean creature—something in the region of three million pounds. Now hear me out, Carfax.

"The most terrifying and incorruptible body of men is closing in on you. Never mind Scotland Yard; never mind M.I.5; never mind the F.B.I. and Interpol. Commend me, brother, to the Department of Inland Revenue, your bugbear. If you declare your earnings, or gains, about 99 per cent of the total will be forfeited. You are watched, and what you have you dare not spend. What you want is that I clear the way for you. Is that so?"

"You exaggerate the sum, you know," said Carfax. "But it's true the Inland Revenue has got narks and informers everywhere, so I daren't spend it—or keep it because that won't suit."

I continued, "I will proceed, having taken your twenty-five pounds. I was not born yesterday. All you can do with your miserable money is bury it in a hole in the ground; but while you might be content with that, your wife would certainly not. In fine, you want an outlet for your money."

"Well, all right."

"What outlet?" I asked. "Where an outlet? Carfax, it is my business also, to know what goes on in the world. Your only outlet is the United States of America. Your capital is in mixed currency, jewellery, and bullion—"

"Is it?" said Carfax.

I replied, "Now look here, Carfax, and I will give you the general line. Point One: 'good as gold' used to be a notable phrase in England, but gold in England is no longer good. Brother, you wouldn't get three jumps away with your bullion.

"Point Two: speaking of well-known jewellery, you have Lady Elphick's diamonds, worth on the open market a matter of two hundred thousand pounds.

"Three: you played the race-course with Straight-as-a-gun

Ziggy, and came out with a fat profit. It's all right, Carfax, I know you paid Ziggy two thousand five hundred pounds for 'fixing.' Good enough?

"To proceed: you've got foreign currency which is more than your liberty is worth to push in the market. No, sir, you've got to get that load to France, and then to the United States. Contradict me if you dare!".

Carfax said, "Well, I wouldn't mind getting the stuff across the Channel and making a deal in France, if you get what I mean. What I mean to say, I can change it into something no bigger than four volumes of the works of Charles Dickens. These I can get to America, and the contents I know where to flog there. Do you foller me?"

I knew perfectly well, of course, what he would exchange his little fortune for. Obviously, heroin, cocaine, and morphine. So I said, "H, C, and M?"

"A word to the wise is sufficient," said Carfax. "Do you want to deliver?"

"On a percentage basis, naturally," I said.

"And what would you call a percentage basis?" he asked.

I said, "My dear Carfax, I am a man of business. First of all, there is a fee for transportation, in which I include certain actuarial risks. You must assume, Carfax, that my income is not low. You must also assume that if anything goes wrong, I am liable as an accessory to about ten years in prison.

"I am afraid that I must insist upon twenty thousand pounds in advance since you are carrying about three million; otherwise, no deal."

He said, "Karmesin, you're off your rocker. Call it ten thousand and we'll discuss."

"Go to the devil," said I.

We settled for fifteen thousand pounds.

But, fool though Carfax was, he knew how to make a bargain. He said, "How do we get the stuff over? And how do I get back? Little boat?"

"Plane," I said, "I have a good clean transport. I can drop you within twenty miles of Paris; put you in a car, bag and baggage, but—this is an important matter—you must tell me how long you are likely to keep me waiting."

"A matter of four hours. But where's your plane?"

"Between Bedford and Northampton. Private airfield," I said. "You will come with me by train, Carfax. If I guess rightly, one or two of your young men will be following by car—or your sons, perhaps?"

Carfax said, "The trouble is, every dirty yobbo thinks he's an

executive—you can't spit on a foggy night without hitting one. Believe me, I know. Like I said, there's only two boys in the world—apart from yourself—that I trust, and they are my sons. And oh dear me, they don't trust each other.

" Who's the pilot? "

Now my pilot was a discreet fellow, an ex-night fighter who had made himself a marriage, got himself a little boy, and was trying to get a job doing stunts for the movies. His name was Flight Lieutenant Canless.

He could not get a position in civil aviation because of honourable injuries.

However, I said, " Carfax, the least said the better. We have all fallen into the soup in our time. In any case, I'll stand by."

He said, " I'll bet you will. But come on now, fair play, eh? You'll stand by me, but a couple of my boys will stand by you, Karmesin. I ought to warn you that I arm 'em with—"

" Save your breath which, I may say, is redolent. You arm your boys with .25 automatics loaded with steel-jacketed bullets; they make little noise, but have penetrative power.

" Carfax, there is nothing at all you can tell me that I do not already know."

Carfax said grudgingly, " This I know. But you get your pay only when I'm safe back in England."

I said, " With your little parcels? Very well, Carfax—not that I approve of what the French call stupéfiants, and the English call narcotics."

He said, " Supply and demand. What more do you want? "

" Nothing more," I said, " nothing. Three days from now I will pick you up at Euston in time for the seven o'clock train. I have not the slightest doubt that a couple of your young men will be following in a souped-up Cadillác."

" How did you know it was a Cadillac? "

Disdaining to reply, I said, " Seven o'clock Thursday evening at Euston station, Carfax, and you have my word on it that you shall be delivered safe on English soil, with nothing to embarrass you."

" I'd better be, you know."

" Meet me, then, and we take off from my private airport."

Carfax said, " I've got to have a hand with me, Karmesin, because—not to lie to you—I'm carrying weight, and I've got a bit of the old blood pressure. The buzzing, if you get what I mean, between the ears and up the back of the neck."

I said, " Enough, Thursday."

" Ah, but you don't get a penny, you know, until I'm safe back."

I said, "This has already been discussed. Good evening."

So Carfax went his way and I went mine, and as I walked—always with an object in view—I argued with myself as follows. Take this creature. He is almost too clever to live. Who is the greatest fool in the world? Why, the cleverest, because he grows to be the most vain.

Then I went to one of those funfairs, one of those places where people flirt with death. I say "flirt" advisedly, because there is no intention of a consummation. They have not the slightest fear in the anticipation; for they know there will be no consummation. The same thing happens in lovemaking, with which I am not concerned this past forty years. There are women who, as the saying goes, tease.

By the same token, there are people who love to tease the old man with the scythe. Thus, the apparently dangerous fun and games—your rollercoasters, and what not—are vastly popular in places of amusement. By the same token, immense popularity attaches to games where you throw things, fire small arms, and so on.

Now in a funfair to which I went there was young Flight Lieutenant Canless who owned a concession. He had been in trouble in his time, and I had helped his mother a little bit. A pound here, a pound there—what's the difference? The boy Canless got into bad company. He got into quite good company a few years later when he became a night fighter in the Battle of Britain.

Young Canless was one of those boys with a peculiar knack for machinery combined with a sense of quiet desperation. The two go together. Fearing everything, he set his teeth and feared nothing.

He was shot down somewhere and lost an arm. The war being over, I advised him that now was the time for gaiety.

In point of fact, I helped to purchase an old transport plane which, on the ground, could go through all the gyrations of a night fighter: sixpence for two minutes. It was a valuable attraction.

So I went to where Canless was, and said to him that I wanted a favour, for which I'd be prepared to pay.

He said to me, "I owe you plenty favours, Mr. Karmesin. Don't talk about pay. Name the favour."

Pointing to his machine, I said, "This contraption: it can loop the loop, roll, dip, drop, and all that?"

"All that, and tailspin too."

"Is it transportable, Canless?"

"Oh yes. I hitch her to a tractor. She can't fly, you know, but I can cover the country with the old cow."

I then said, "I don't know what you make a day around here. But I will guarantee you one thousand pounds for twenty-four hours of your time and the use of this lump of ironmongery. Do you happen to have a strong and resolute friend?"

"There's Cheerful Charlie, who helps around the lot. He was my favourite erk. Bit shortsighted, and weighs fourteen stone. Was nearly heavyweight champion of the Air Force, only —you know how it is—man couldn't keep his chin down. Stuck his face forward and his neck out. We used to call him the turtle. But game as a pheasant, and will fight like a stag; and what with the hidings he's taken, his face is something to haunt your dreams. But what's the gen? Is it legit?"

"It is not merely legitimate," I said, "it is humanitarian.

"Bring your machinery and Cheerful Charlie to Nobbutt in Northamptonshire. It is a flat piece of country, distinguished only by the fact that the demented poet William Cowper and his pet hare lived nearby. It is also not far from Bedford which, as you know, gave out a slightly deranged tinker named John Bunyan who wrote *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

"Arriving at Nobbutt, inquire for Karmesin's field. There, set up this piece of nonsense, you and your turtle, and wait for me. You will find it best to set up shop close by a prefabricated hut or waiting-room, which I'll provide.

"It is also my intention that you and your turtle carry arms—unloaded. These I have: one, a U.S. Army .45 automatic; the other, an English revolver of the same calibre. Loaded or unloaded, anything one aims at with these things is quite safe. Now here is five hundred pounds, and I rely on you."

Canless did not want to take the money, but he took it and agreed to be with Charlie and his apparatus at the appointed spot somewhat in advance of the appointed time. There was to be discreet lighting—very discreet.

He introduced me to Charlie the erk, and I could not have wished for a better man. He had a military bearing—but it was at an angle of about thirty degrees—and his ears were thickened; put yourself in a crate with that man, and you might come out badly; only he was wearing a pair of Army issue steelrimmed glasses, even with which he had to get within two feet of an object before he could discern it.

I said to Canless, "You will be pilot, of course. Let this one be air hostess, or steward. Buy him a white jacket, a blue cap. I leave it to you."

So I went back to Carfax and told him to get set. In his usual

manner, he said, " Karmesin, old cock, in this mob we generally use a .25 automatic with steel-jacket bullets. But you're a big fellow, so I'm packing a 9 mm. Luger."

I replied, " I never carry arms. But if you frighten me to death you will lose your means of transportation. In short, tell it to the Marines and be ready for the train."

He was worried, and said, " Dog doesn't eat dog."

" There are dogs and dogs," I said.

So we made our arrangements, to cut a long story short, and got on the train.

Please allow me a little philosophy. It is not much I ask of life—a little philosophy, a little psychology. With, perhaps, a shot of metaphysics, and a dash of bitters one acquires? I say that this Carfax, the most astute criminal in England, was easier to rob than a baby.

To cut it fine, I used a child's trick on this over-subtle fellow. We got out to the airfield, if I may so call it, where I had set up that aeroplane.

Rest assured that Carfax was at my elbow, and his goons—as I think they call them—not far behind. They carried the bullion to the extent of about, in troy weight, seven hundred pounds.

Flight Lieutenant Canless was at the controls in a blue cap, and an electric sign went on saying:

NO SMOKING

PLEASE FASTEN YOUR SAFETY BELT

The doors were slammed, the engines turned over, and then the fun began.

I suppose you know that you can take about three minutes of one of these toy aeroplanes. Try it, I suggest, for two and a half hours—this piece of engineering performing every known gyration to the thirty-two points of the compass.

I was there for psychological effect. From time to time I shouted, " It looks like we are going into the drink! "—at which signal Canless would do a nosedive, a tailspin, and a sort of bellyroll. The plight of Carfax and Co. was something pitiful to see.

From time to time I bellowed warnings about being in the drink, and all that. Carfax, crushed, begged for mercy after a couple of hours.

At a signal from me, we looped the loop a couple of times, bumped in the most sickening manner, then steadied ourselves. Eventually, bump-bump-bump, we landed.

Only, you see, we had never left the ground—what time a

few of those surrealist French travel posters had been put in my little hut. A few artistic touches, a bottle of Armagnac, a copy of *Le Rire*, et cetera.

I have never seen a sorrier handful of criminals than Carfax and his boys when they got out of what used to be a plane. I said, "Powerful car here. Put the bullion in the boot." So, very unsteadily, they did.

Then I said, "Now, Carfax, I'll trouble you for that canvas belt round your waist."

I added, "For goodness sake, don't try to pull one of your little guns, because my friends and I carry things of larger calibre. Furthermore, you could not hit the side of a barn at ten feet, so be sensible.

"Unbuckle, Carfax, and if you pull out the wrong thing, one of us will let you have it in the stomach—which, I believe, is sufficiently empty after your little trip to contain a few grammes of lead. Your boyfriends, also, are moving in circles, while we are steady as stones.

"Will you have the goodness to unbuckle your belt? Or shall one of my friends be your valet de chambre?"

Carfax said, "Karmesin, I'll get you for this!" But he let fall a canvas belt about twelve inches wide.

Canless picked it up and handed it to me. I had to drape it about my shoulders, Carfax was such a big man.

Suddenly, he whimpered, quite demoralised, "How do we get back to England?"

"You have your passports and some money in your pockets," I said. "Everything else failing, go to the Consulate and weep. Now, if you take the road straight ahead, bear left, hit the main road for about eight miles, you will find yourself at a perfectly respectable railway station."

"You promised—"

"I promised to land you on British soil," I said, "and so I have. You are equidistant between Bedford and Northampton. Charlie, hitch the tractor to that contraption and take it back to the funfair.

"Canless, get at the wheel and let her roll!"

Carfax said, in a broken voice, "Karmesin, I'll split fifty-fifty."

I replied, "What kind of a fool do you take me for, when I have the whole lot?"

So, while Charlie drove the machine back to the funfair by means of a tractor, Canless drove me at high speed to London.

On the way I told him, "Apart from what you get, remember that there is a moral in this. A child could not have fallen for this lay, but that corrupt creature did. It was a child's trick—which

leads me to conclude that, tough as they think they are, a child can lead them."

"Oh well," said Karmesin, "the proceeds, as I told you, amounted to £2,530,700—we will ignore the odd shillings. Every penny of this I gave to the Rehabilitation Fund of Free Europe, deducting for myself only twenty per cent plus out-of-pocket expenses. For my work in this matter I charged nothing.

"And that is why your famous Carfax is now reduced to an endowment policy which, to him, is abject poverty. True, he owns the freehold of his home in Highgate—but he is reduced to the level of a petty rentier and, the cost of living being what it is, he is a poor man.

"Worst of all, as I told you, he dare not lift a finger now, even to get me knocked on the head."

Karmesin, if not the greatest criminal, at least the greatest and most plausible liar of his time, then added, "Carfax has no influence any more, even among those who used to worship him. And upon what did this worship depend? Upon the fact that Carfax was safe because he was rich. It is not for me to moralise, but riches and respect go together."

Grinding out a twice-rolled butt under the heel of a well-worn shoe, he said, "Do you happen to have a fresh cigarette about you?"

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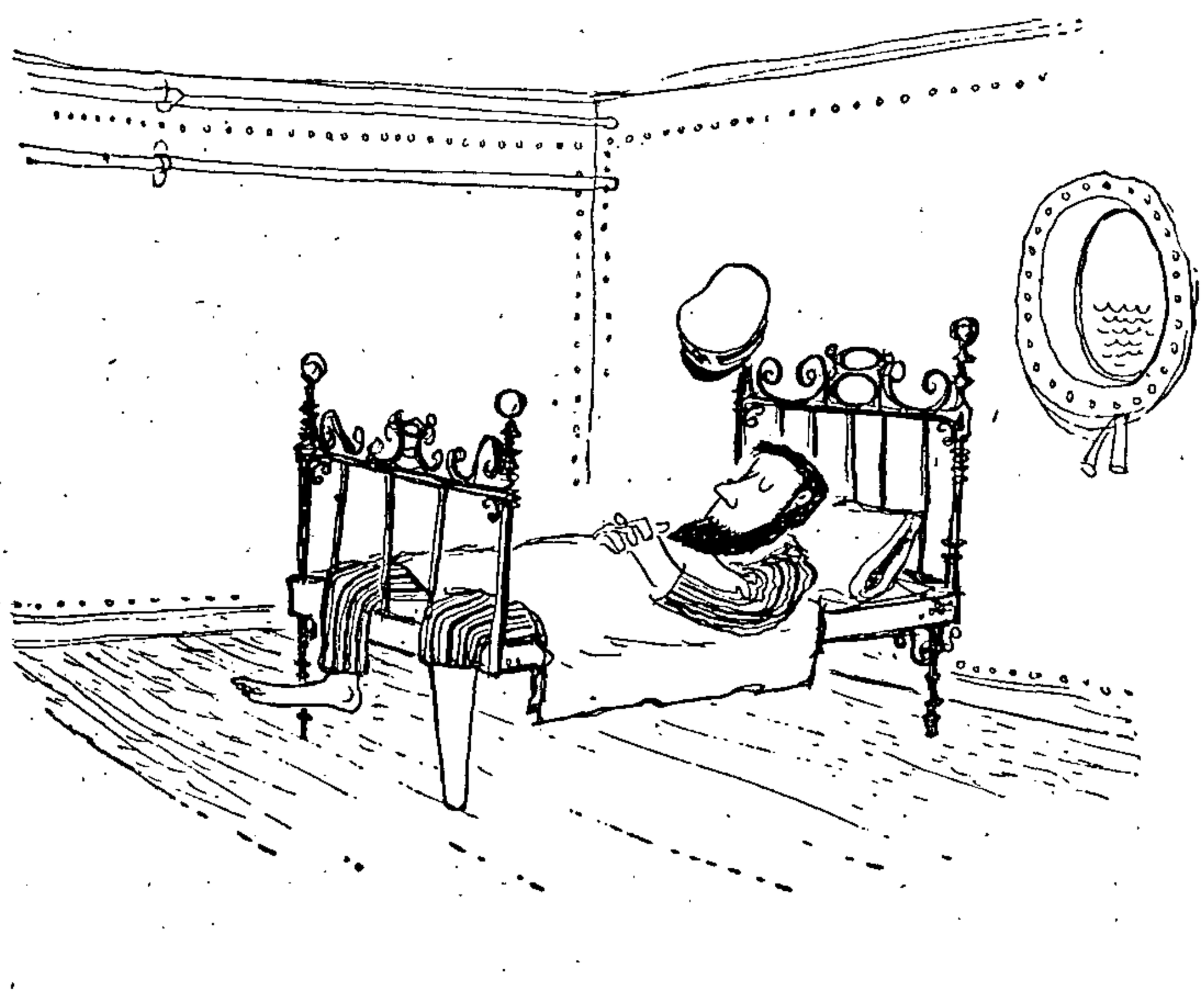

PENTHOUSE CRY

The key was still there—
icy to his touch

BY HENRY SLESAR

THAT WAS Coombs for you; he had to pick a night like this to settle his affairs. Brander tightened the muffler round his throat and dug gloved hands into his overcoat pockets, but there was no way of barricading his body from the subzero cold.

The city streets seemed glazed with ice, and the taxis rumbled past the corner with clouds of frost billowing from their exhaust pipes. The wind carried knives.

Brander winced at every thrust and was almost tempted to forget the whole thing. But he couldn't afford it. Tonight was payoff night, and he wanted to get hands on the money that had lingered so long in Frank Coombs' pocket.

Then he had a stroke of luck. A cab pulled up and a red-cheeked matron got out; he almost knocked her down in his haste to occupy the back seat.

Brander gave the cabbie the address of Coombs' block of flats by the river, and stepped out ten minutes later into a night that had grown even more insufferable. He fought the arctic river breeze all the way to the entrance, and was grateful when the glass doors closed behind him.

There was something eerie about this exclusive block of flats, an unearthly quiet that was a combination of overcarpeting and underoccupancy. The building had been completed only two months before, with a fanfare of publicity. But the expected stampede of tenants had never really materialised: the expensive luxury flats remained largely unoccupied.

Nevertheless, Frank Coombs had been impressed. Coombs had been one of the first to sign a lease, and for nothing less than the building's fashionable penthouse. In the operator-less lift, Brander's mouth twisted in a frown as he rode past the last eight unoccupied floors to reach the plush apartment that Coomb's borrowed money had bought him.

At the door of the penthouse, he stabbed the bell and muttered, "The swine!"

Warmth flooded out of the doorway when Coombs answered.

Pleasant steamheat-and-fireplace warmth, whisky warmth, the warmth of geniality. That was Coombs for you: the perennial host, always ready to smile and clap you on the back and make you welcome, and all so smoothly you scarcely even noticed the hand dipping into your pocket to count the contents of your wallet.

"Brander!" Coombs chortled. "Damn nice of you to turn out on a night like this. Come in!"

Brander went in, shedding his coat as he followed Coombs.

The lavishly-furnished room was rich in textures: furry carpets and nubby upholstery, satiny curtains and polished panelling. And Coombs had many textures himself: waxen smooth hair, silken cheeks, velvet smoking jacket, roughcut briar.

He gestured with the pipe, and said, "Well, what do you think, Brander? Does this place beat the pants off that old dump of mine or not? The minute I heard about this building I jumped for it—"

Brander grunted. "Nobody's killing themselves to get in. Half the flats are empty."

"Only the top-floor flats, they're the really expensive ones, you know." He gathered up his visitor's overcoat. "Let me hang this stuff up. Maybe you'll want that jacket off? I keep it warm in here." He put his hand on Brander, and was shaken off.

"I'll hold on to it," he said, looking round. "Yes, it's quite a place, Frank. Sure you can afford it?"

Coombs laughed. "Don't you worry about old Frankie. When I told you I knew my investments, I knew what I was talking about. You won't regret lending me that dough, take my word for it."

"Then the deal worked out?"

Coombs coughed. "Let's have a drink. I'm ten fingers ahead of you."

"We can have the drink later. Look, Frank, I came out on a hell of a night for this. You made a lot of big promises about that dough, and now I have to know. Is it a payoff or a stall?"

Coombs started to help himself to whisky, and then ignored the soda. He downed the drink in three large gulps, and said, "It's a payoff, Brander, like I told you. Before you leave, I'll give you a cheque for every nickel you lent me. Plus."

"Plus what?"

Coombs laughed again and took a step forward, swaying slightly. "You'll see, you'll see. But come on, don't be so mercenary. We used to be pals, remember. I want you to see the place—"

" I've seen it."

" You haven't seen the best part." He swept his hand round the room, encompassing the wide, heavily-curtained windows. " I've got three hundred feet of terrace out there, and it's all mine. Greatest view of the city you ever saw— " He strode over to the double doors and flung them open, admitting an inquisitive cloud of cold air.

" Come on, you won't freeze. Just take a look at this, will you? You never saw anything like it in your life—"

Brander stood up. Through the open doors, the lights of Manhattan blinked and glowed. It was a hard sight to resist; city lights, like earthbound stars, had always compelled and excited him.

Then, as if to tempt him further, Coombs gleefully pulled back the curtains from the window, enlarging the view. " How about that, huh? Gets you right here, don't it? " Coombs touched the monogram on his velvet jacket.

" What are all the bars for? " Brander asked.

" The window bars? " Coombs tittered. " You know me, pal. Never trusted anybody. Burglars are always bustin' into penthouses, so I had the builders bar all the windows. Even the door is made of steel; I don't take any chances. But come on, man! "

Brander went forward, out on to the terrace, no longer feeling the cold or hearing the wind. Manhattan, obliterated in contours, was etched before him only in golden lights. He caught his breath.

" What do you think of it? " Coombs chuckled. " Is this living? Is this the life? "

" Yes," he breathed.

" You feast your eyes, boy. I'm going to make us a drink. You just look at that," Coombs said, going back into the room.

Brander looked, and felt strange and restless and exalted. As if in a dream he stared, until he realised that he was coatless and hatless in the worst cold that had descended upon the city in seven years.

Shivering, he turned back to the doorway of the warm flat just in time to see Coombs' grinning face, in time to see Coombs calmly and without hurry closing the terrace doors.

" Hey," Brander said, shaking the door handle. " Open up, Frank."

Misty behind the small diamond patch of glass set into the metal door, Coombs' face stopped grinning and became a silken mask. He lifted the drink in his hand as if in salute and took a long swallow.

Then he moved away.

"Hey!" Brander shouted, shaking the door harder but not causing a single rattle in its hinges.

"Let me in, Frank! It's goddam cold out here!" He couldn't see Coombs any more, but he knew he must be there, enjoying his little prank.

Brander thudded with his fist on the small pane of glass, and felt the solidity of it, saw the tiny octagonal wire mesh that made it unbreakable. He shoved against the door and remembered that it was steel.

"Frank! Damn it, cut out the clowning, Frank! Let me in, will you?"

Then the lights went out in the penthouse flat.

It was only then that Brander knew Coombs had planned more than an impulsive joke. He wasn't going to reopen the sturdy door that led back into the warmth, not in the next minute, or the next hour. Maybe even—

"*Frank!*" Brander screamed, and realised that he could barely hear his own voice as the wind came by and swallowed the syllables greedily.

"*Let me in!*" he yelled soundlessly, hammering and pounding and kicking at the door.

There was no telling how long he stood there, denying the fact that the entrance was closed to him. Finally he moved away towards the windows; one touch of his hand recalled that they had been barred against intruders, against the entry of strangers or friends.

He was neatly sealed out of Coombs' penthouse, where the warmth was. He was alone, outside, with the cold.

Cold! So heated had been his exertions that Brander hadn't even been aware of the temperature. But he felt it now—cold that gripped his flesh as if he hadn't an ounce of clothing on him. Cold, and a howling, vicious wind that whirled the frost like an icy shroud round his body. Cold so terrible and so inescapable that Brander had thoughts of death.

It was no joke. He knew that now. It was no coincidence that Coombs had chosen this night for their rendezvous. It was the cold that Coombs had been waiting for; cold and the freezing wind and the dark night: the chance to leave his creditor shivering and alone outside the steel door of his penthouse flat, to end his debt for ever in death.

But how would Coombs explain it? What would he say when they found Brander's body, a victim of exposure in the middle of the city?

Brander stopped thinking about it and went to the terrace wall

to peer down at the terrifying distance between himself and the street.

" Help! " he shrieked. " *Help me!* "

The wind took his words. He cried out again, but the lights were dark in the untenanted floors beneath him and no one heard.

" They'll never hear me," he said aloud, the sobs beginning in his throat. " They'll never know I'm here . . ."

He made a circuit of the terrace, round and round and round the penthouse, searching for some weakness in the fortress of Coombs' apartment. There was none. Already his feet had become numb; he could barely feel his own footsteps. He clapped his hands together, and then pounded them over his body in an effort to keep the blood circulating.

" Got to keep moving," he muttered. " Keep moving."

He began to run. He ran wildly, staggering round the terrace until his breath left him and he fell, panting, to the frigid stone floor.

" Got to get help," he said to himself.

He began a frantic search of his pockets. His hands first touched the bulk of his wallet, but his fingers barely felt the leather. He looked at it stupidly for a moment, and then took it to the edge of the wall.

" Write a note," he said. But even as he said it, he knew that he had discovered no solution. He carried no pen, no pencil, no tool that would help him tell the indifferent world below that he was a prisoner of cold, twenty storeys above the street.

He looked at his wallet and then flung it over the wall. He lost sight of it at once, and there was no hope in his heart for rescue.

In his breast pocket he found cigarettes and matches. He tossed the cigarettes aside and then tried to light a match in his cupped hands, eager for even one pinpoint of warmth. The wind, capricious, wouldn't permit the luxury; in disgust, he hurled the matches over the wall.

In his right-hand jacket pocket he found a key. He looked at it blankly for a moment, not recognising it. It wasn't *his* key; he'd never seen it before. He almost threw it away, but then stopped when he realised what it was. It was a key to the front door of Coombs' apartment. Coombs must have slipped it into his pocket. But why?

Then he knew. If Coombs had given him a key, then Coombs could explain Brander's mysterious death. If he was found with a key on his frozen body, then anyone would believe that he had used it to enter Coombs' flat, and then had been locked out on the terrace by his own foolishness or misfortune . . .

Clever! Brander wanted to laugh, but his features were like stone. Not so clever, he thought, getting ready to hurl the key out into the night. But then he stopped, clutching it in his hand, knowing that, though useless to him here on the terrace, it was a key to the warmth only a few tantalising inches away. He couldn't part with it.

He put the key into his trouser pocket, and went back to the penthouse door. He hammered on it until the skin of his hands cracked and bled. Then he fell in a heap and sobbed.

When he got to his feet again he was delirious. For a moment he thought that the cold had gone, that the weather had suddenly turned deliciously balmy. But it was only the delirium and a moment's lull in the wind.

When the icy blast came again, it was a kind of blessing: it woke him to his situation, filled him once more with the desire to help himself.

He leaned over the waist-high wall and shouted helplessly into the night.

"I'm here," he moaned. "Oh my God! Don't you know I'm here?"

Then he thought of the roof.

The penthouse had a roof. If he could find access to it he might reach a door leading below, into the other floors of the building.

He took a handkerchief from his trouser pocket and wrapped it about his painful, bleeding right hand. Then he felt his way carefully along the wall.

A wire brushed his face.

At first he didn't do more than touch it lightly. Then he gripped the wire between his numb hands and yanked. The wire held; it was thick, stout cable. If he could climb it . . .

He tensed every muscle in his body, and held on. Then he leapt off the ground and swung his feet to the penthouse wall.

For a second, he hung, frozen, unable to move, willing to give up and die rather than force his aching body into action once more.

Then he thought of Coombs' silken smile, and the hate gave him strength. He inched upwards slowly, the smooth wire cutting like a razor's edge into his palms.

It was an agony. He went upwards another inch, and then turned his eyes into the darkness. He saw the lights of the city, and now they seemed like the distant fires of hell.

Another inch. Another. He wanted to let go and enjoy the luxury of falling, the tranquillity of death, but he kept on.

He saw the edge of the roof.

With a last, gasping effort he clambered up the wire, scraping his knees against the side of the masonry walls until the rough stone shredded cloth and skin. Then he flung himself over the side, to safety.

It was only some ten feet above the terrace, but the wind and the cold seemed more terrible here. Along the rim, ghostly jutting shapes surrounded him. Television antennae. He blinked at them as if they were curious spectators.

He staggered about in the darkness until he found the roof door. His hand touched a doorknob, and he cried out in relief.

Then the cry became a moan.

The door was locked.

He screamed and raged at it in fury, but not for long. He put his hand in his trouser pocket and felt the key to the penthouse.

"You win, Frank," he tried to say aloud, but his lips couldn't form the words.

He moved back towards the edge, knowing no sensation in his limbs. He leaned against a tall aerial, limply.

They say don't fall asleep, he thought, chuckling in his throat.

He began to slip to the roof floor, and held on to a trailing wire for support.

The wire!

The flat, broad, light wire lay in his numbed hand, and he remembered what this wire could do.

He tugged at it. He tugged harder. He tugged frantically, desperately, insanely. He found other broad, flat wires depending from the antennae of the roof, and tugged at them. One of them came loose in his hand, but he wasn't satisfied.

He went to them all, tugging and yanking until he felt sure that the effects of his work had been seen or noticed somewhere below, that he had ripped or torn the metal ribbons from the bright, glowing instruments of the warm, unaware people in this fancy block of flats by the river.

He began to laugh through unmoving lips as he went about his destructive labours. And then, when he was too exhausted to go on, he fell to his hands and knees and tried to remember how to pray.

Minutes later, a light exploded on the rooftop.

"Hey, look at this," he heard a voice say.

"Must be some kind of a crank . . ."

"My picture was acting funny, but I thought it was just the wind . . ."

"I haven't been getting *any* picture, and right in the middle of the show . . ."

Hands touched him. Warm hands.

"Hey, this chap's in a bad way . . ."

"Wouldn't be surprised if he froze to death out here . . ."

"Better get him inside . . ."

"Thanks," Brander tried to say, but it was only an unspoken thought. When he felt the first touch of the warmth on the other side of the roof door, he let himself enjoy the luxury of unconsciousness.

He was on a sofa. His mouth held a bitter, molten taste, and there was a furnace roaring in his stomach. His hands and feet were burning, and he began to squirm to avoid the tongues of the flames.

He opened his eyes and saw the broad, fleshy face of an anxious elderly man.

"You O.K., son? What the hell were you doing out there, anyway?"

He couldn't answer.

"That's all right, don't try to talk. I'm Collyer, from Flat 12. I found you up on the roof. Those other people wanted me to call the police, but I said, 'What for? All he needs is to get warm.' That's why I brought you here to my place."

Brander looked about him and studied the new textures of the strange flat. He forced himself to sit up, and recognised the taste of alcohol in his mouth.

"I thought a little brandy'd help," the man said, watching him. "I guess you must have got locked out, eh? You live in the building?"

"No," Brander said, in a voice he didn't recognise. "I—I was just looking at the flats upstairs. Thinking about renting one, maybe. Then I remembered hearing something about a balcony on the roof, and I went to have a look—"

"Hell of a night for sightseeing," the man grunted.

"Yes. But I went, just to see. The next thing I knew, the door slammed behind me."

"Quite a wind up there, all right. We all thought it was the wind that was knocking the aerials about, until we found you." He chuckled. "Lots of people in the building are sore at you, son. Especially since they can't get a repair man until late tomorrow morning."

"I'm sorry."

"Never mind that; you did the sensible thing. Here, where're you going?"

Brander was on his feet, tightening the knot in his tie, moving unsteadily towards the door.

"You can't go out like that—"

" It's all right, I'll get a cab. Got to be going."

" Let me lend you something. Coat or something—"

" No, I'll be all right," Brander said, his hand already on the doorknob.

" Maybe you ought to see a doctor."

" I will, I will! " Brander said, and went out into the quiet, overcarpeted hall.

He pressed the button that would bring the automatic lift to the twelfth floor, and then dug into his trouser pocket. It was still there, icy to his touch: the key to Coombs' penthouse.

When the lift arrived, he stepped inside and punched P.

He didn't turn on the lights as he entered. He went to the cupboard and found his overcoat, his hat, and his scarf.

He put them on, but felt no warmer.

Then he went to the double doors of the terrace, unlatched them, and opened them a scant two inches.

He returned to Coombs' sofa, and sat down in the dark to wait.

At one-thirty, he heard the key in the lock.

He rose unhurriedly, and went towards the doorway of Coombs' bedroom, concealing himself behind it.

The front door opened. Coombs, muttering, stepped inside. He stumbled about the darkened room, dropping his overcoat on the carpet before his hand found the light switch. Then, still mumbling, he looked blearily towards the terraces and chuckled drunkenly. He went to the drinks cabinet and poured himself something from a bottle, no ice. He downed it, still looking at the terrace.

Brander watched the glass come down slowly, and heard Coombs say thickly, " What the hell? "

Coombs went to the doors. When he found them unlatched, he opened them wide and stepped out on to the terrace.

" *Brander!* " he heard him shout, in chorus with the wind.

But Brander wasn't there.

Brander was racing across the carpet of the penthouse living-room, racing to reach the terrace doors before Coombs could return. He won the contest easily, slamming the steel portals shut even before Coombs was close enough to see his triumphant face. But he waited behind the wire-meshed diamond pane of glass, waiting for Coombs to get near enough to know; to understand.

" *Brander!* " he heard Coombs cry, his voice muffled and thin. " For God's sake, Brander, let me in! "

Brander smiled, and moved away. " Don't try messing with the aerials," he said, although he knew Coombs could not hear him. " Nobody's watching TV tonight."

"Brander; for the love of God! *Brander!*"

Outside, in the passage, he could no longer hear the faintest sound of Coombs' entreaties. He took the lift to the ground floor and nodded pleasantly at the hall porter who was looking skywards with a frown.

"Bad night," Brander said conversationally.

"And gettin' worse," the porter answered, holding out a broad, flat palm. "See what's comin' now?"

"What?" Brander asked, looking at the sky.

"Snow," the porter said.

Brander corrected him. "Sleet."

★ ★ ★

THE DEADLY SEX

Better half, of course, does not refer to an improved footballer but to the tender portion of the human race. Are you au fait with the fair sex? If not, brush up your feminine facts on page 143

1. *Who was "She"?*
2. *a. When did women get the vote in England?*
   b. Was it a good thing?
   c. Who was the first woman Member of Parliament?
3. *Can you identify the creators of: a. The Fair Maid of Perth; b. That Lady; c. The Woman of Rome?*
4. *Which British queens were known respectively as:*
   a. The Warrior Queen;
   b. Mistress Morley;
   c. The Widow at Windsor?
5. *To what lady can one cry, "Haro, haro!"*
6. *Who were these beauties: a. Princess Flavia; b. Flora Macdonald; c. Fleur Forsyte?*
7. *Who: a. created the term "nymphet" for very small ladies; b. thanked heaven for little girls?*
8. *Who said, The female of the species is more deadly . . .? Was it true?*
9. *Who said: a. Frailty, thy name is woman;*
   b. What female heart can gold despise?
   c. Cherchez la femme;
   d. When lovely woman stoops to folly . . . What art can wash her guilt away?

LET DOWN YOUR HAIR

BY JOAN AIKEN

"GREGORIO," said Lady Massingham, "I am going to turn white in a single night."

"Grazie, la Marchesa," Gregorio said absently, if courteously—he had trained all his staff to use this feudal-sounding form of address with clients and it paid off handsomely. Then he stiffened as the import of what she had said struck home, and exclaimed, "Signora! Prego! You are joking?"

Turning her exquisite head between his sensitive palms as he moulded the last Titian coil into place, he gazed anxiously into the mirror at Lady Massingham's inflexible blue eyes. In them he read his doom. It was as if the Bishop of Milan had casually mentioned to Leonardo da Vinci that his Last Supper was going to be covered with a coat of whitewash.

"It's high time," she went on. "Here I am, nearly fifty—" underneath the hairdresser's cape she crossed her fingers with a *mental grimace at Providence*—"*and the thing is, Gregorio, that* I know I should be quite ravishing with snow-white hair."

"La Marchesa would be ravishing with sky-blue hair," said Gregorio earnestly, "but is it not a pity—?"

"*No*, Gregorio. The step has to be taken some time. The bridge has to be crossed. I refuse to go through a series of undignified transition stages. I am going to sustain some nerve-shattering crisis from which I shall emerge with my magnificent vitality unquenched, but with an exquisite silvery cloud in place of your superb auburn. E bello, no?"

"No," said Gregorio crossly, enveloping her in a spray of blue mist and removing the cape with an expert flip. Then he remembered his part, bowed deeply, hand on heart, and said, "Scusi. Whatever la Marchesa wishes is my law. Dmitri, bring the Signora's cape. Though I should tell you, Signora, that it will break my heart. When does la Marchesa wish the—the operation to take place?"

"Well," Lady Massingham said, looking at her diary, "not next week, nor the week after. In fact, not before Easter. I shall need time to make the necessary adjustments in my wardrobe and to revise the colour scheme of the flat. Say the week after Easter."

"Va bene," said Gregorio, flourishing his pencil over the appointment book. The new assistant came back with Lady Massingham's cape and stood lovingly stroking its ruffled fur into sleekness.

"So you'll be ready to come down into Surrey with me for a night?" she went on ruthlessly.

"La Marchesa?" The pencil rolled to the floor.

"I have to arrange for the horrifying experience," she explained, "and of course I need hardly say that you will have to be on the spot, Gregorio."

"But why in Surrey? Does no one have a horrifying experience in London?"

"The wilds of Surrey would be more plausible. I shall stay with my brother George—he doesn't know it yet but he can't have any objection—and something devastating will happen: a flood, an avalanche, a forest fire—"

"Signora cara! An avalanche?" said Gregorio, his eyes bulging.

"Too expensive, you think? Maybe you are right. Well, we might arrange to be attacked by the Demon Barber."

"Do not speak of him, signora! I have a horror of unknowingly hiring him as an assistant."

"Not very likely that you'd unknowingly hire an escaped homicidal maniac, surely?" said Lady Massingham, glancing round the peaceful salon as she collected her possessions. "Isn't he easily recognisable—black hair and staring eyes?"

"But, la Marchesa, think how easy for a professional hairdresser to change his appearance. Paulson was a coiffeur for many years before he ran amok and killed nine people."

"Yes, the Demon Barber is an excellent idea," she said, disregarding him. "People are always seeing him here and there; I expect somebody will see him in Surrey. Thank you, Dmitri; just put it round my shoulders. The nineteenth, then, Gregorio; Rubens will call for you with the Daimler. I shall depend on your exquisite skill."

"Niente, la Marchesa." He swooped to open the door, bowed deeply, and looked gloomily after her retreating back.

George Newbery read the last of his letter and flung it violently on the floor.

"What's the matter?" asked his daughter Julia, looking up from her porridge.

"Ffolkes suggests that as Professor Sawdinge is in the next TV discussion programme I might prefer not to take part. It's the thin edge of the wedge," said Mr. Newbery. "They want to ease me out of television, that's what it is. It's the beginning of a campaign of persecution." He looked glumly at his diary, which was heavily studded with TV rehearsal and programme dates.

"Well, Father," said Julia reasonably, "you know you did throw an ashtray at him when you were discussing teenage problems."

"Yes, and I'd throw it again! Of all the pompous, ill-informed—"

The telephone rang. Mr. Newbery answered it.

"Newbery here—oh, hullo, Georgina . . . Yes, we are, thank you . . . Yes; Julia's very . . . No, she isn't, not yet . . . You want to do what? Turn *white?* . . . Coming down with a memorial? . . . An oratorio? In heaven's name, what for? Almighty and merciful serpents," snarled Mr. Newbery into the receiver, as the imperious voice crackled into his ear, "I never heard such a completely crackbrained scheme in my life, and why I should be expected to be a party to it—"

Overcome with rage he hurled the receiver to the floor. It stopped crackling. He picked it up, shook it, remarked coldly, "It seems to be out of order," and replaced it on its rest.

Julia got up thoughtfully and noted the fact on a small pad headed BREAKAGES, which she kept handy by the kitchen sink. It was the third entry for that day.

"Father," she said, returning, "this temper of yours is getting to be a nuisance. No, wait—" as he began to rise up at her like a boiling rice pudding—"it's no use flying out at me, I'm telling you for your good. There's a limit to the number of ashtrays that people will allow to be thrown at them. I went out yesterday after I'd bandaged the postman and bought a book for you." She laid it beside him—a slim, blue-bound volume. It was called, *How to be Cool, Calm, and Collected.*

Mr. Newbery looked at it with aversion. "You just take it away to your study," Julia went on inexorably. "It has some extremely helpful hints in it."

"You're so like your aunt it isn't true," growled Mr. Newbery.

"What did Auntie Georgina want, anyway?"

"She's coming down tonight."

"Oh good. Then I can ask her advice about Richard."

"She's bringing some dismal hairdresser chap called Gregorio."

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"What on earth for? Auntie G's hair is always so marvellous."

"She says she wants to go white."

"You must have misheard her," Julia suggested. She glanced sideways at the shattered telephone.

"Anyway, they're both arriving at half past seven," Mr. Newbery said, retiring from the kitchen with triumphant gloom.

Once in his study he made an honest effort to read the book Julia had given him. *Remember the happy moments of your childhood*, it said. *They flash before your eyes. You are tranquil, calm, serene. Take a deep breath. Now another. Try to compose your mind so that if death were to find you now, this moment, you would not be unprepared. Forget those nagging worries about your business, your social life . . .*

Mr. Newbery read on, beetroot-coloured; he was holding his breath, assuming that the book would tell him when to breathe again, but no further instructions were given, and at the foot of the page he let out three cubic feet of carbon dioxide with a furious gasp, and flung the book through the window.

Julia was pegging teacloths on the line. *How to be Cool, Calm, and Collected* fell at her feet. She shrugged, and put it into the clothesbasket. Another effort had failed.

"We're going to be a bit of a crowd tonight," Julia said to Richard Stoke, who always spent Wednesday nights with them. "Auntie G's coming with a hairdresser. Do you mind the sitting-room sofa?"

"Of course not." So long as he was near Julia, Richard would not have objected to a bed of spikes. His only wish was that he could get a little nearer. "Why a hairdresser?" he asked.

"We don't know."

"Perhaps he'll teach you how to use a home perm," said Richard teasingly, looking at Julia's soft hair, which sprayed like dark feathers above her deceptively innocent blue eyes, and he sang,

"Curlylocks, Curlylocks, wilt thou be mine?
Thou shalt not type letters nor yet hold the line,
But sit on a cushion and dream a fine dream,
And feed upon strawberries, sugar, and cream."

Julia looked at him with reluctant affection.

Lady Massingham arrived soon after, with a panoply of Daimler, chauffeur, luggage, a lot of hairdressing equipment, and Gregorio, who was plainly twittering with nerves.

"Go away, Rubens," she said to her chauffeur. "Come back tomorrow at nine. I have to go to a literary elevenses, and you know what the traffic's like between here and London. Well, Julia dear, why aren't you married yet? At your age I'd already

disposed of two husbands. Good evening, George, blood pressure keeping down?" Mr. Newbery kissed her and then hurried away. The sight of his sister was almost more than his irascible nature could bear.

"Who's this?" she said, eyeing Richard keenly. "Is he reliable?"

"Certainly," said Julia. "He is practically one of the family." Richard thought her tone sounded resigned.

"Good. Then let me tell you about tonight's programme. I propose to retire to my room now—"

"Don't you want any supper, Auntie G?"

"No, dear child, I know your cooking. I've brought some foie gras sandwiches and my usual flask." Lady Massingham's usual flask contained iced Liebfraumilch. "I have a number of letters from constituents to answer, and I want to get on with them. Now listen attentively. A strange man will knock on the door presently. He will be in some form of predicament, and you will ask him to stay the night."

"Oh, goodness, Auntie G, where are we going to put him?" said Julia weakly.

"You may have a camp bed in my room, and your young man can have the sofa. In the middle of the night the stranger will start to prowl and you will realise with horror that he is the Demon Barber, the escaped lunatic; fortunately he was seen this afternoon by an elderly lady in South Croydon, which caused me finally to decide in his favour. Somebody will tackle him—you could do that," she said to Richard, "but he will escape before you can ring up the police."

"We couldn't ring them anyway," said Julia. "The phone's out of order. Will he really be the Demon Barber, Auntie G?"

"Of course not, ninny; he is a young man with the highest references from a reputable theatrical agency. Now the point I want to emphasise is this: neither Gregorio nor I must be disturbed."

"Then I don't see the point," said Julia.

"Now, dear child, it's not like you to raise all these difficulties. What's one stranger more or less to you? I've never stayed here when someone *didn't* knock on the door and get taken in for the night. All I wish is that we shall not be bothered; I am very busy, and Gregorio will need a good night's sleep because he has an exacting task ahead of him tomorrow. It will be quite sufficient for my plan to hear later of the horrible danger to which I have been unwittingly exposed. Call me at seven; I like weak china tea with lemon, you remember, Julia dear. And mind you stoke the boiler; we shall want plenty of hot water."

" But if—" Julia began.

Her aunt ignored her. " Now, dear child, if you'll just help me unpack—" she swept Julia upstairs, leaving Richard astonished, but quite pleased, at seeing his beloved overborne for once by superior force.

" Dio mio," muttered Gregorio. " Beside la Marchesa a bulldozer would be like a bambino's bucket and spade."

Upstairs, Julia had discovered a few more facts about her aunt's plan.

" Really, Auntie G," she said, " I think it will be best if we don't mention this Demon Barber business to Father. He's so short-tempered nowadays. He might fly into a rage and mess up the whole proceedings."

" Very well, my love."

" I'll try to get Father to bed before the man arrives. If he's still up, we'll let him believe it's a genuine traveller in difficulties. Once Father's asleep nothing wakes him, so we shan't have to worry about the midnight fracas. Richard can cope with that."

" Why do you sound so philosophical about Richard? " Lady Massingham asked, with an acute glance at Julia.

" He's nice," Julia sighed, " but I wish—" She paused, and added uncertainly, " Sometimes I think he's afraid of me."

" We must rouse him up." Her aunt's tone was practical. " I'll consider the problem as soon as my hair's dealt with. And your father's temper; something's obviously got to be done about that."

Julia ran downstairs to make supper. Later, munching the solid pancakes, Gregorio sighed wistfully and thought of Lady Massingham's epicurean picnic. He reckoned he was earning every penny of his hundred guineas.

" You're looking tired, Father," said Julia at ten, when they were watching television. " Don't you think you'd better go to bed? "

Mr. Newbery flew into a passion. " I'm chivvied about every minute of the livelong day! " he shouted. " Can't even sit by my own television set for ten minutes. You wait till *you're* married," he said ominously to Richard. " You'll be sorry you didn't light out while you had the chance."

The doorbell rang.

" Now what, *now* what? " Mr. Newbery said. " This place is like a public bar at night—strangers barging in all the time."

Julia ran hastily to the door and opened it on a dapper, fair-haired young man with very bright eyes, who bowed slightly and said in an indefinably odd accent, " I'm very sorry to bother you, but I wonder if I could use your phone to ring up the nearest

garage. I've stupidly run out of gas on the way up from Portsmouth—"

"Of course. Do come in," Julia said, leading the way. "That is, I'm afraid our phone is out of order, but won't you stay the night, and when the milkman comes in the morning we can ask him for a pint of petrol—"

Seconded by Richard, she overbore all the stranger's protestations.

Mr. Newbery sat dumb with astonishment. Had Julia suddenly gone off her head? Every time he opened his mouth to say there was a garage a hundred yards up the road she cut in with some remark, asking the young man about himself.

He told them that he was an American, from Boston, "Name of William Makepeace Todd,"—Gregorio, who was watching him with strange concentration, visibly blenched—"a playwright, just arrived in England to search for material."

"And have you had any plays put on in New York?" asked Mr. Newbery, becoming interested.

One, at a Sunday theatre, Todd said modestly. Asked about it, he confessed that it was a problem play, called *The Missing Hair*, about a young man who was a throwback to an Indian ancestor and had a compulsion to scalp his mistress. Gregorio became paler and paler. Julia and Richard had gone to the kitchen to make coffee. He slipped out to join them.

"Signorina Julia!"

"Oh, hullo, Gregorio. Would you be a lamb and take this tray?"

"Signorina, that is not the right man!"

"Not the right man?" she said, disconcerted. "How do you mean?"

"He is not the man your aunt hired to impersonate the Demon Barber. This is an impostor! Either that, or—" sinking his voice—"he is the real one!"

"Oh, nonsense!" said Julia, glancing over her shoulder. "That would be too much of a coincidence. Here, I'm taking a cup of coffee up to my aunt; you'd better come, too."

Upstairs Gregorio poured out his suspicions to Lady Massingham, trembling with agitation. She listened impassively.

"Well," she said at length, "either the agency has sent another man instead of the one we interviewed, or else the real Sweeney Todd—I mean Paulson—has turned up, which would be a piece of most unexpected good luck. In either case, Gregorio, the best thing for you will be to go to bed and lock yourself in; you must have a good night's rest. Julia, get your father to bed, too, so he's out of the way."

"Don't you think Richard should go for the police?" Julia said doubtfully.

"Certainly not. The situation is developing excellently. Now leave me, both of you, please; I want to study my speech."

"Don't worry, Gregorio," said Julia kindly. "There's a good strong lock on your bedroom door."

"Grazie, signorina," Gregorio muttered in trembling tones, making for the bathroom.

Julia ran downstairs. To her dismay she found that her father had plainly taken one of his enormous fancies to the strange Mr. Todd. They were deep in argument about auto-suggestion.

"Impossible!" Mr. Todd was saying.

"Of course it's possible! If you have a record playing beside you while you sleep, whispering a suggestion over and over again, the thought is imprinted in your mind, and when you wake you proceed to act on it. For instance I suffer—like many intrinsically good-natured people—from a hasty temper. But I bet if I had a record by my bed that whispered to me all night, 'You are calm and peaceful,' or whatever it was that wretched book said—" he glared at it—"I should wake up quite calm and cured."

"Well," said Mr. Todd beaming, "I entirely disagree with you, but we can easily test your hypothesis. As it happens, I had a breakdown a few months ago—" Julia darted a nervous glance at Richard—"and since then I've suffered from total insomnia, don't sleep a wink. So I'll sit by your bed all night reading aloud to you, and we'll see what the result is."

Mr. Newbery was delighted. "My dear chap! How very obliging of you. Here's a pencil torch. Come on, let's go up right away. Just give me time to get off to sleep before you start, will you? This is your room here, if you want to dump your stuff, and mine's on the right." Mr. Newbery never could tell right from left. "Good night," he shouted down to Julia and Richard. "Don't forget to lock up."

"Good night," Mr. Todd said, pleasantly smiling.

Downstairs Julia and Richard faced one another in some disquiet.

"This is really rather awful," Julia said uneasily. "I don't like the thought of Todd sitting by Father's bed all night. Supposing he had a razor!"

"You're assuming he's the Demon Barber," Richard pointed out. "We don't know that he is. Think of the trouble there would be if you tried to stop your father from doing this."

"I know what I *can* do," Julia suddenly exclaimed, and she ran upstairs. "Father's asleep already," she said when she returned. "It's wonderful the way he goes off. I've put the

alarm clock under his pillow; it's so old that the least touch makes it ring. So if Todd begins—well, begins to *do* anything, we shall know."

"But won't your father set it off himself when he moves?"

"He never moves once he's asleep."

"I hate to upset you," Richard said, "but if a person's asleep on his back you can cut his throat with hardly any movement at all."

Julia gulped, but said hastily, "Father always sleeps on his front, with his arms over his ears."

Upstairs, Gregorio tiptoed shivering from the bathroom, slid into his own room, locked the door, heaved a sigh of relief, and crossed to his bed without switching on the light, which was by the door. It took him a little longer than Mr. Newbery to get to sleep, but at length the sound of his regular breathing filled the room.

"What shall we do?" Julia said to Richard. "We daren't go to sleep. In any case there's only the sofa; I forgot to put up the camp bed in Auntie G's room, and I can't possibly disturb her again." Richard was pleased to see that her usual composure had quite deserted her; she was pale and melting and distracted; she looked at him appealingly.

"May as well sit on the sofa, then," he said with alacrity. "And how about frying a couple of chops? Anxiety makes one hungry. We could put the frying-pan on the sitting-room fire; there's quite a lot of it left."

They put the pan on the fire and settled on the sofa to watch it. After a while Julia said in a muffled voice, "Those chops are burning."

"Never mind," Richard said. He tightened his arm about her.

Blue smoke filled the room.

Upstairs, Gregorio dreamt of immense hairdryers with mouths like ravening sharks. He whimpered, waking himself. Julia's pancakes lay heavy as iron filings on his chest. He lay gazing unhappily into the dark. All of a sudden he started violently as a soft voice beside his bed began to speak.

"Remember the happy moments of your childhood," it whispered. "They flash before your eyes . . . Take a deep breath . . . Try to compose your mind so that if death were to find you now, this moment, you would not be unprepared . . ."

Gregorio lay rigid as a paralytic. Rivers of sweat poured off his brow, his jaw was clenched with the agony of trying not to move. He looked straight ahead, but he could see a faint glitter from the corner of his eye. It looked like the shine on the blade of a razor.

Slowly the hours of night passed . . .

Julia stirred, shifted her head to a more comfortable position, opened her eyes, and gazed with sleepy astonishment about her. At some point in the course of the night Richard had procured a couple of blankets; she was covered with one of them and he was sleeping peacefully on the floor, rolled in the other. She looked at her watch and gasped; it was ten to seven. Grabbing the frying-pan full of cold chops she ran to put on a kettle.

"Well—" said Lady Massingham ten minutes later, sipping her lemon tea with approval, "did it all go according to plan, dearest child?"

"Mr. Todd seems to have vanished," Julia said. "Richard went on a tour of inspection during the night, and he wasn't in his own room, or in Father's. Gregorio's and yours were locked, so we think he must have climbed out of the bathroom window. Nothing seems to be missing."

"Excellent," Lady Massingham said. "He must have been the real man. It makes me shudder to think of the danger we have been in. I shall give that agency a piece of my mind when I ring them. By the way, I've thought of a plan for getting rid of your unexciting Richard. I'll put it into operation at once."

"Oh, thank you, but please don't bother," Julia said in haste. "I've—well, I've changed my mind about him." She beamed radiantly at her aunt and ran from the room, banging on Gregorio's door as she passed it.

The house vibrated with the shrilling of the alarm clock, and Mr. Newbery came sleepily out of his bedroom, remarking, "Good morning, Julia," with such amiability that she gave him a startled look as she hurried down to make ten pieces of toast.

Mr. Newbery appeared at breakfast rubbing his hands.

"I told you so," he said. "I'm a changed man. I can feel it. Brimming with the milk of human kindness. Why, if Professor Sawdinge were to tell me now that homicidal maniacs could be cured with bicarb, I'd just give him a great big peaceful smile like this . . ."

His smile wavered as he saw his sister descending the stairs.

"I knew Todd would do the trick," he finished hurriedly.

"But, Father, Todd's gone. He's never been in your room," Julia began. She stopped. Her father was not attending. He was gazing past her at the stairs. Julia turned and gasped.

Gregorio was tottering down, leaning heavily on the banisters. He staggered weakly to a chair and sank on it, his head in his hands. Behind him came Mr. Todd, brisk and smiling as ever. Speechlessly, Julia passed them each a cup of coffee.

"I made a foolish mistake," Mr. Todd said cheerfully.

Lady Massingham exploded with rage. Her eyes flashed, her chest heaved, her auburn coronet quivered, she looked like Brünhilde.

"Gregorio!" she thundered, "what is the meaning of this? Are you making fun of me?"

"Oh, don't, Auntie G," pleaded Julia. "Can't you see he's upset?"

"Now I shall have to cancel all my arrangements," stormed Lady Massingham. "You've put me in a perfectly ridiculous position, Gregorio—and what were the rest of you doing, to let such a thing happen? Incompetent oafs, the whole boiling of you! I shall not remain under this roof another instant." She glanced round, and her eye lit on Mr. Todd, placidly finishing his coffee. "You, sir; can you drive me up to London?"

"Yes, if I had some gas," said Mr. Todd gaily. With a wordless gesture Lady Massingham indicated the garage in plain view across the field. They left, Mr. Todd thanking the Newberys politely for their very interesting hospitality.

"Do you think it's right to let him go off with her?" said Julia. "He may cut her throat in the car."

"And a good thing, too," said Mr. Newbery, full of unbrotherly feeling. "What a temper! It's a lesson to us all. You wouldn't see *me* fly out in that nasty way, I can tell you," he added complacently. "Why should he cut her throat, anyway? She hasn't said anything to him."

"We think he's the Demon Barber."

"I'd back her against him, even so."

"Actually he isn't the Demon Barber," said Richard rashly.

Julia turned on him like a mosquito. "How do you know?"

"Because I saw Todd's play, *The Missing Hair*, when I was in New York on leave. He made a speech afterwards. Same man."

"And you let us believe—you—you—"

"Now, Julia, paddy-paws, paddy-paws," said her father.

Richard grinned. "I thought it might spoil the verisimilitude if I mentioned it," he said. "It was too good an opportunity to waste."

Julia gave him a long, thoughtful look, and began to soothe the stricken Gregorio.

"What shall I do?" he wailed. "Dio mio, la Marchesa will never forgive me! And what shall I say to my clients? A coiffeur whose own hair goes white in a night, che disgrazia, what an affliction! But to hear that man telling me that I must be prepared to die! Never shall I forget it, never."

"Now, Gregorio, don't take on so," soothed Julia. "You

look lovely with white hair. Very distinguished. You tell your clients it's a new process and they'll flock in."

"Ah, signorina, you are so kind, so encouraging. If you wish your hair turned white I do it con amore, for nothing."

"O.K., that's a date. Just give me a few years first. Look, here's Rubens with Aunt G's Daimler. You can go back in comfort."

The bandaged postman brought a card from the theatrical agency regretting that Mr. Brown had been prevented by appendicitis from keeping his appointment.

Any lingering doubts Julia might have had as to Mr. Todd's identity were cleared up when she read next week that the Demon Barber had been recaptured; he had been found peacefully pursuing his profession in Gregorio's Bond Street salon under the name of Dmitri Szimanovsky.

Gregorio's clients were enchanted to think of the danger to which they had been unwittingly exposed and flocked to him in larger numbers than ever.

Lady Massingham returned to him in due course, but she never entirely forgave him for stealing her gimmick, and she remained auburn to the end of the chapter.

Mr. Newbery never realised that Todd had not been in his room reading to him, and Julia decided that it was more sensible to leave him his faith in the powers of auto-suggestion, as it had such a beneficial effect on his temper.

Seeing a paragraph about Mr. Todd in the evening paper she wrote a note to him at his hotel suggesting that he might care to come back for another night. Now *there* was a really exciting personality . . .

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★ ★ ★

FARE SHARES

Conductors, like drivers, get a bit absent-minded at times. Dot was looking into the window of a butcher's shop and planning dinner just before the bus reached a stop. Suddenly she realised that she ought to be calling out the name of the stop. So she pulled herself together, and shouted it at the top of her voice: "Sausages."

Even passengers do this, too:

"Two, please," said one of them.

"Two what, please?" asked the conductress.

"Two small loaves and a cauliflower, please."

C. R. WASON, *Busman's View*

Under the greenwood tree
Who loves to lie with me . . .

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *As You Like It*

If you will sing, let it be cheerily
Of dallying love. There's many a one among you
Hath sung, beneath our oak trees to his maiden,
Light bird-like mockeries, fit for love in springtime.

THOMAS LOVELL BEDDOES, *Death's Jest Book*

Crackle of Twigs

He stopped thinking and merely felt. The girl's waist in the bend of his arm was soft and warm. He pulled her round so that they were breast to breast; her body seemed to melt into his. Wherever his hands moved it was all as yielding as water. Their mouths clung together; it was quite different from the hard kisses they had exchanged earlier. When they moved their faces apart again both of them sighed deeply . . .

Winston put his lips against her ear. "*Now*," he whispered.

"Not here," she whispered back. "Come back to the hideout. It's safer."

Quickly, with an occasional crackle of twigs, they threaded their way back to the clearing. When they were once inside the ring of saplings she turned and faced him. They were both breathing fast, but the smile had reappeared round the corners of her mouth.

She stood looking at him for an instant, then felt at the zipper of her overalls. And, yes! it was almost as in his dream. Almost as swiftly as he had imagined it, she had torn her clothes off, and when she flung them aside it was with that same magnificent gesture by which a whole civilisation seemed to be annihilated.

Her body gleamed white in the sun. But for a moment he did not look at her body; his eyes were anchored by the freckled face with its faint, bold smile. He knelt down before her and took her hands in his . . .

"You like doing this? I don't mean simply me: I mean the thing in itself?"

"I adore it."

That was abòve all what he wanted to hear . . . He pressed her down upon the grass, among the fallen bluebells.

GEORGE ORWELL, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

Willow Pattern

Under the willow shades they were
Free from the eye-sight of the sun,
For no intruding beam could there
Peep through to spy what things were done.
Thus shelter'd they unseen did lye
Surfeiting on each other's eye.
Defended by the willow shades alone,
The sun's heat they defied, and cool'd their own.
Whilst they did embrace unspy'd
The conscious willows seem'd to smile,
That they with privacy supplied,
Holding the door as 'twere the while.
And when their dalliances were o'er,
The willows to oblige 'em more,
Bowing did seem to say, as they withdrew,
We can supply you with a cradle too.

WILLIAM D'AVENANT, *The Rivals*

Pine Needles

They stopped to part among the Scotch firs.

"Then my life will be filled with hope, Maggie—and I shall be happier than other men, in spite of all? We *do* belong to each other—for always—whether we are apart or together?"

"Yes, Philip: I should like never to part: I should like to make your life very happy."

"I am waiting for something else—I wonder whether it will come."

Maggie smiled, with glistening tears, and then stooped her tall head to kiss the pale face that was full of pleading, timid love.

GEORGE ELIOT, *The Mill on the Floss*

Clover Girl

By the merest chance in the twilight gloom,
In the orchard path he met me;
In the tall, wet grass, with faint perfume,
And I tried to pass, but he made no room,
Oh, I tried, but he would not let me.
So I stood and blushed till the grass grew red,
With my face bent down above it,
While he took my hand as he whispering said—
(How the clover lifted each pink, sweet head,
To listen to all that my lover said;
Oh, the clover in bloom, I love it!)

HOMER GREENE, *What My Lover Said*

Bird Watching

The red bird twisted, whistled, rocked, tilted, and trilled, and the grey sat demurely watching him, as if only half convinced he really meant it. The gay lover began at the beginning and said it all over again with more impassioned gestures than before.

The Girl caught her breath in a swift spasm of surprise and wonder. She turned to the Harvester.

"What was it you wanted to say to me?" she asked hurriedly.

The Harvester was not the man to miss the goods the gods provided. Truly this was his lucky day. Unhesitatingly he took the plunge.

"Precisely what he said to her. And if you observed closely, you noticed that she didn't ask him 'why.'"

Before she could open her lips, he was gone, his swift strides carrying him through the woods.

GENE STRATTON PORTER, *The Harvester*

In the Same Boat

Green rushes with red shoots,
Long leaves bending to the wind—
You and I in the same boat
Plucking rushes at the Five Lakes.
We started at dawn from the orchid-island;
We rested under the elms till noon.
You and I plucking rushes
Had not plucked a handful when night came!

ARTHUR WALEY, *translated from the Chinese*

PAVONE'S WELL

I held the girl's hands as if I could
compel the truth out of her

BY BRIAN CLEEVE

FOR one long second that stopped my heart I thought it was Maria. The same eyes. The same dark sweep of the hair off the white forehead. The same curve of the body as she leaned forward over the well, the thin rope dripping silver between her two hands as she swung the bucket over the parapet. And I almost called to her, "Maria, Maria;" almost started running with my arms flung wide and my heart singing.

And then I remembered that it was sixteen years since I'd seen Maria standing like that. She'd be in her thirties now, the same as me. And this was only a girl. Twenty, maybe. Maybe twenty-two. And I remembered how it had been the first day I'd seen Maria, sixteen years ago.

The same hot Italian sun beating on the dusty road. The same faded pink farmhouse wall behind her, with a wooden shutter swinging wide on its broken hinges. And far down and beyond, the same blue shimmer of sea, twenty miles away, reaching out and out to the heat haze on the horizon. Nothing had changed except the quietness.

There had been guns then, in the south. Like a long roll of thunder that never ended, where we were inching forward against Kesselring's last sullen armies. Big slamming hammer blows from the guns driving steel wedges of men into a wall of other men. And I remembered Sergeant Hollis unslinging the transmitter and listening to the thunder.

The transmitter was the reason we were there, ten miles behind the German lines. Pick up reports from the partisans and radio them back. Sergeant Hollis to work the transmitter and make the decisions, and me to talk Italian, because although I'm from the farm-country west of Detroit, my mother is Italian, from near Forli, and she taught me. I've even had Italians tell me I've a Forli accent.

But this trip my only accent would be American, because I didn't want anyone to know that I spoke Italian, or that I'd ever been here before. Almost without thinking I put my hand

up to the little narrow moustache I'd grown, and the side-whiskers. Would they have changed me enough?

It had seemed simple in Detroit. To come back as a stranger and find out what had happened that night, sixteen years ago, when Sergeant Hollis and Maria had disappeared. Just come back and look and listen—and wait. If you wait long enough and want hard enough, my father always used to say, you'll get any mortal thing on earth. And what I wanted was simple enough. Just one piece of information, and then—time to decide what to do . . .

The girl had seen me now and was straightening up, lowering the heavy wooden bucket to the ground. It spilt a cupful of water by her bare feet, and the white dust blackened where the water fell, making a pattern like a dark map in a pale sea. Even the pattern seemed familiar, as if I'd lived this moment before, every sight and scent and detail of it.

I dragged the Italian phrasebook out of my pocket and fumbled through one of the set phrases, accenting the wrong syllables. " Is it possible, signorina, that one can rent a room in the farmhouse for a short period, say a fortnight? "

I had to repeat the pantomime twice before she understood. When the light broke and she smiled and nodded, I wondered how I could ever have thought that she was Maria. Because when Maria smiled it was like sunlight, like a summer's day, all the warmth of her heart in it. But when this girl smiled it was like broken moonlight darting from behind a cloud.

It was only when you saw her smile that you realised how sad her face seemed normally. The kind of sadness that has grown into a habit shaped the features. You have to be sad a long time to look like that; to make sadness look ordinary. The smile went as quickly as it came, and her face was grave again.

She lowered her eyes and swung the bucket up, leaning sideways to the weight. " I will ask," she said.

Then I was alone in the yard. I looked round, remembering. The barn where we'd slept, whenever we could sleep, with the transmitter disguised as a bale of straw. The kitchen windows where I'd see Maria working. And above the steep lichen-grown tiles of the roof, the grey-green corner of the vineyard. I remembered walking through it at dawn one morning.

I had seen the red rim of the sun lifting above the greyness of the Adriatic, turning sea and sky crimson, and the farm spread out below me. And in that second of growing light Maria had come out, walking half drowsily across the yard to the well—black hair loose on her shoulders, faded blue overall pulled round her, feet bare.

And it had been in that second that I knew I loved her. Not in the way any young soldier might love any Italian girl who was beautiful enough. But the way a man loves a woman that he wants to marry.

And that had been the last time I ever saw her.

We had been there for two weeks, and the guns had hammered almost five miles towards us in that time. Two, three more nights, and we'd have had to clear out anyway, before we were overrun by retreating Germans. But that same night, while I was still dead to the world in my first long sleep for a week, that night, without a word, Sergeant Hollis and Maria had disappeared.

And I had lain awake many nights in the past sixteen years, asking the darkness why? Where had they gone? And why? Always, why?

The army thought it knew. Nothing pointed to enemy action. No stray German patrols that day. No rival partisan groups. Nothing. One of the quietest days there'd been. I had to admit that when I was questioned. Just a sergeant with a few thousand dollars in his money-belt, in case we had to make emergency payments to partisan groups. And a girl who could turn any man's head. They put him down as a deserter in the books, and added him to the list of other fellows the military police would be glad to pick up. But they never saw him.

I supposed that somewhere, in Washington and Rome, he was still in an unclosed file.

"It isn't true," I told myself over and over again, but as the years went by it got harder to think like that. First love affairs begin to look pretty foolish when you turn thirty, and you see a lot of seemingly fine men do stranger things than deserting from a dangerous job. Until at last Sergeant Hollis, who'd been a big man to me in the Company, and Maria, who had been more than that, started to fade a little; and it was only sometimes, when I woke in the small hours, that I'd remember them. And then maybe a year ago, maybe less, I'd started remembering them again like a sharp pain, as if a wound had reopened. Almost as if they were trying to tell me something there in the dark.

And I'd lie and think until I was sweating and cold and the window was getting pale.

Why had they done it? Why? And where were they now? I had to find out or go crazy.

And so I threw up my job on the Schultz farm, and packed a bag, and sailed for Europe, with all the time this place etching itself in my mind, sharper and sharper: the barn with its peeling,

pink, and leprous plaster; the high two-storey farmhouse, and the one-storey kitchen jutting out at the back, with the lichen turning the tile roof from old maroon to pale gold; the flat, worn bricks of the yard.

And now I was here again, with my holdall dusty from the roof of the bus, and the sunlight beating on me, and somewhere a long way away a man sharpening a scythe. There were footsteps and I started smiling, expecting it to be the girl. But instead of that it was Pavone, and for the second time that day I felt my heart check and then thud in my chest, as if the past had reached out and hit me.

I don't know why. I'd known he was pretty certain to be there. He was Maria's cousin. In the old days he'd managed the farm for her.

Now he was probably the owner, unless Maria had come back. The same limp that had kept him out of the Italian army. The same heavy jaw and sour, suspicious eyes. He'd grown heavier with the years, that was all. As thick in the waist now as in the chest.

"Well?" he said. No recognition in the eyes. Nothing.

I gave a soft, involuntary whisper of relief, because my one hope of finding out what had happened was not to be known. Once I was recognised; once anyone got the idea that I was snooping after old crimes, I might as well leave for Detroit again the same day. They'd think they were protecting Hollis and Maria; looking after their own against outsiders, against "authority."

And nothing I'd ever say would convince them that I wasn't an outsider, that I had nothing to do with authority. My one chance was for no one to recognise me, no one to know that I was after anything.

That way, if I waited long enough, looked and listened hard enough, I might stumble on something. So this first moment of meeting with Pavone was all-important. If it went wrong, this could be the end of the journey.

I kept my hands loose and still beside me, although I wanted to touch my moustache. By the way Pavone looked at me I felt sure I hadn't needed even that much disguise. A man in his thirties looks different from the way he did at twenty. I'd filled out and was taller. And I'd been in uniform then.

I dragged out the phrasebook and went through the act again.

Pavone looked at the ground a long time, rasping his nail on his chin.

"All right," he said at last. "Twelve hundred lire a day. In advance."

I found I'd been holding my breath again. "Yes," I said, "in advance."

"And wine extra," he said.

"Wine extra," I agreed, and then I started flipping the pages of my book again as if I wanted to find something else to say. But he'd turned on his heel, and I remembered how he'd been even sixteen years ago. Sullen and heavy as the stones he spent his days shifting out of the thin soil of the fields. We hadn't trusted him at first, Hollis and I. Until we realised that nothing mattered to him except the farm. Not us. Not the Germans. Not the partisans. Nothing but the farm, the work, the grapes swelling.

I don't recall that he ever spoke ten words to us. And he didn't seem to have changed.

"Dina," he shouted suddenly. "Dina." And the girl came running, almost out of breath with running. He pointed at my bag and at me, and then up at the second storey of the farm, as if she was deaf and had to be told things in sign language. She nodded, and hefted my bag from the ground before I could get my hand to it.

"This way," she said, padding in front of me. Pavone slouched round the corner of the building the way he'd come, and I followed the girl.

It seemed almost cold inside the house after the sunlight. Bare brick floors. The sparse furniture heavy as timber. Sunlight filtering through closed shutters until it was only a pale suggestion of itself. Then the stairs, dark as nightfall, and the plaster walls peeling with damp. It was hard to believe the house was lived in, it seemed so desolate.

"Are there many in the family?" I said, rustling my phrasebook.

"Only my uncle and myself," she said.

There had been about ten of them in the old days, according to Maria, uncles and cousins and brothers and children, although all but herself and Pavone and an old, old couple of poor relations had been scattered to the four winds by the war, drafted into the army or evacuated to the north. Had none of them come back except this girl? But I couldn't ask without seeming to know too much.

"We eat at seven o'clock," she said, pointing into a small bedroom.

She disappeared down the corridor, and I went inside. The bed wasn't made up yet, and it smelt musty, as if the shutters hadn't been opened for a long time. I wondered whose room it had been in the old days? Maria's? Hardly. She must have

had a bigger room than this. And yet I could almost believe that something of Maria was in the room with me.

"Maria," I whispered. "Are you there, Maria?"

"Yes?" said a voice behind me. And for the third time that day I felt that cold, sick emptiness inside me as if I was seeing things and knowing things that didn't belong to the ordinary world. I didn't dare look round, and I felt the sweat cold on my face.

Then I realised that it was Dina. She had come back into the room carrying sheets, a coarse brown blanket, and a pillow.

"I came to make your bed," she said. "I thought you said something."

"Nothing," I said, wiping a shaking hand across my face.

And for a long time after she'd gone again I sat by the narrow window staring across the bright, dust-white yard with my heart pounding.

That night at supper none of us spoke five words from first to last. And when Dina had taken the dishes from the table Pavone simply pointed up the stairs, lit two candle-stumps, and gave me one of them. By half past seven the house was silent as a tomb. And as dark.

If they live like this, I thought, even when there's a guest just come, no wonder Dina has those shadows in her face. But why do they? Why? In the old days, even with the guns like midnight thunder in the south, the house was alive: men from nearby farms in for a gossip; a partisan down from the mountains for his first hot meal in days; girls in to laugh and talk with Maria. But now it was like the grave.

Half past eight. Half past nine. Ten. I lay listening. To an owl calling in the darkness. A board creaking. My heart beating in the stillness. Was that the handle of my door moving? A footstep? Someone breathing?

I strained my ears. The door opened half an inch. An inch. I lay still as death. Breathe, you fool. Breathe. They're listening for breathing. I sighed and stirred the way a man does in his sleep. The door closed as softly as it had opened, and the footsteps faded.

Why had they come? I sat up and listened, holding my breath. Were those voices? I crept to the door, opening it as quietly as a shadow.

Down the corridor there was a faint line of light under a door. Five strides in my bare feet and I had my ear to the panel. It was Dina's voice; too low to distinguish words and yet sounding sullen and frightened.

And then Pavone's voice, suddenly sharp. "Maria? He said, 'Maria?'"

"That's what it sounded like. How do I know what he said? I don't know English." She was speaking louder this time and I could hear her. And there was no mistaking the fear now. She was frightened to death.

"English!" said Pavone savagely. "I've told you he speaks Italian like you do. What else did he say?"

"Nothing. I've told you. Nothing." She was almost crying.

"You're lying," Pavone said, and there was the sharp, ugly smack of a blow. Instinctively I put my hand to the door handle, and then, very slowly, drew it back. It wasn't Maria in there. Just a strange girl. And from the way she shut up after the blow, it wasn't the first she'd had from her uncle. What was it to me, compared with what I might learn by keeping quiet?

"You're lying," Pavone said again. "What are you hiding? What did he say to you?"

"Nothing, nothing." It was almost a shriek, as if she could see the hand lifted to hit her again, and I could hear in her voice that she was sobbing.

There was a footstep on the floor of the room inside, and then Pavone's voice cursing just the other side of the panel, almost against my ear.

I leapt back and down the passage to my own room, and barely had the door closed before I heard the far door creak softly open. Then cautious footsteps up the passage, halting at my door. The handle turning again, gently, slowly.

I put my foot on the bed and made the springs stir as if I was restless in my sleep, and the handle stopped still and slowly turned back again.

After a long moment the footsteps went away. Not back to Dina's room but in the opposite direction.

I sat on the bed, trying to think it out. One thing was certain. I'd been wrong about not being recognised. So why had they let me in? Because they had nothing to hide?

They were too frightened for that to be true. The whole house smelt of fear. It was sick with it. Pavone and the girl were sick with it. Then why not turn me away? Obviously because the one way to find out whether I was dangerous was to have me where they could watch me.

They? Or just Pavone?

How much did the girl have to do with it? And what exactly *was* it? It was like being in a strange town in a fog. Nothing was familiar. Nothing was sure.

Except two things. Pavone knew something about Maria.

Something that frightened him as badly as a man can be frightened. And Dina was frightened of her uncle.

I had the feeling that fear was all that held the two of them together. Nothing but fear. So maybe, maybe she would tell me the reason.

She might not know what she was telling me, and if she didn't, so much the better. She might tell me all the more readily for not knowing she was telling me anything. And anyway I'd nothing to lose.

The game was up before it had begun as far as my original plan was concerned. And unless I made a new plan pretty quickly the next move would be Pavone's.

I went back to my own door and opened it half an inch, listening. Nothing but darkness. Five steps and my ear against the girl's door. From the way she was breathing I knew she was still awake. And still crying.

When I went in she barely moved. Only whispered, "What do you want now, uncle?" with a kind of weariness that no one should have, let alone a girl of twenty-two.

"It's not your uncle," I said to her in Italian. "But don't move. Don't cry out or he'll come. I won't hurt you. Won't touch you." I used the kind of voice you'd use with a dog or a horse that's been ill-treated, soothing her. And oddly enough I wanted to for her own sake as well as mine. As if it had been Maria there, Maria crying in the darkness.

"Where is Maria?" I said, in the same tone of voice. I thought I'd take her off guard with the suddenness of the question, but instead she answered me as if she hardly knew who I meant.

"Maria? My aunt Maria? She's dead. A long, long time ago."

"Dead?" I whispered. "When did she die? Where?" I was kneeling by the bed now, and I found myself holding the girl's hands as if like that I could compel the truth out of her.

"Long ago," she said again. "In America. She ran away with an American and married him, and went to America, and died there. Why do you ask?"

I could just see her face on the pillow now, my eyes getting used to the darkness. A pale blur framed in the darkness of her hair. Did she know she was lying? Or was she just repeating what she'd been told? Because Hollis and Maria could never have reached America without Hollis being picked up. And if that had happened I would have known about it and I wouldn't have needed to be here.

"Then why is your uncle afraid?" I said, and from the way her hands clenched in mine I knew that this time I'd struck home.

" Because of the money," she said, and then drew in her breath as if I'd hit her in the throat. " I didn't mean—" she whispered, " I don't know what I'm saying. Go away. Go away or I'll scream."

The money. Because of the money. And I remembered the money-belt round Sergeant Hollis' waist. The belt he never took off, day or night. And Pavone had known about it. He'd seen Hollis give payment from it to a partisan.

And suddenly I knew the truth, and I found that in my heart I'd known it always.

Maria *was* dead. But not in America. Here. And Hollis was dead, too. Dead in the middle of a world war for the sake of three thousand dollars. Pavone had killed him for the money. And killed Maria, too. Because she'd seen? Because without her the farm would become his? But not legally his, because he could never prove that she was dead, without proving how she'd died.

That had been one reason why he was afraid. In case someone, some time, came asking questions, looking for proof of whether Maria was alive or dead. For sixteen years he'd been afraid of that, living like a beast, afraid of shadows.

" Does he count the money? " I said. In my mind's eye I could see him doing it. By candlelight at midnight, with the doors locked. The money he'd killed for and found he daren't spend. Because how would he have got rid of it? How would a peasant explain having so much money? Before he had exchanged a tenth of it the police would be after him. It takes organisation to keep those things quiet, and Pavone didn't belong to any organisation. Just to the land. And I could almost feel sorry for him; the blind, dumb hunger for land driving him to theft, to murder, to sixteen years of solitude and terror.

" He counts it at night, doesn't he? " I said.

" How did you know? " she breathed. " Sunday nights. I used to help him when I was little, because I was at school and could count better than he could. But I was afraid."

" Why? "

" I knew it wasn't right for him to have it. The way he'd bolt the doors and shiver." She was talking now in little breathless gasps, clutching my hands as if she was afraid to let them go. All the fear in her was in her voice; all the years of loneliness and fear with Pavone while she was growing up It was as if she saw in me something she could cling to, and need not be afraid of. Or maybe she'd been silent so long she had to talk to someone, it didn't matter who so long as it wasn't her uncle.

" Why are you asking these things? " she whispered.

"Because I would have been Maria's husband," I said, "if she hadn't died. If she hadn't been murdered."

"Murdered?" she whispered. Her hands stayed quite still in mine. So she didn't know. She really didn't know. I gave a long sigh of relief.

I lifted her hands and put the palms against my face.

"I want to be your friend," I said. "Will you tell me everything you know?"

And in that second the door slammed open and her face was caught in the bright beam of a torch.

"So," said Pavone softly. "You came back."

I tried to turn but I was kneeling, and off balance, and the light blinded me. I just saw a dark shape swinging, and felt it crash against the side of my head, and then there was nothing except pain, slowly fading.

"Maria!" I was shouting, although my voice sounded very far away. "Maria!" Very faint, very shadowy, holding out her hands towards me and yet drawing farther and farther away. "Maria!" Running towards her, running . . . and then suddenly, sickeningly, falling. Falling endlessly as if the earth had opened under my feet. I must have come to when I hit the water. Deep into liquid, ice-cold darkness. My feet touched bottom and sank into a thin slime of mud.

I thrashed with my arms, and kicked, and opened my mouth to scream, and half the well seemed to flow into my throat. I gagged and choked and fought blindly upwards and the surface broke into splinters of starlight. A dozen stars in the pale circle of the well-mouth. But not quite a circle. A dark shape breaking it. A man's head.

"Are you still alive?" Pavone whispered.

I lay in the water, feeling the well-shaft with my fingertips. Smooth stone, covered with a film of slime.

"You won't be alive long," said Pavone. And he laughed and went on laughing, shaking his big head to and fro in hysterical, crazy bursts of laughter, as if all the years of loneliness and fear were suddenly released in him in a kind of madness.

"They didn't last long either," he shouted. "Drowned," he shouted, "the two of them together. Maria and the American. Drowned, drowned like you. Why didn't you come sooner? Why did you keep me waiting so long?" And he began to cry, beating his hands on the parapet ten feet above my head, while the echoes of his shouting boomed and re-echoed in the narrow shaft.

I saw his arm swinging against the stars, and ducked

instinctively under the surface. Even so the huge stone hit my shoulder so hard I almost screamed with the pain.

I went down again all the way to the bottom, and when I came up the pale circle of the well-mouth was unbroken. Pavone had gone. And I felt like yelling for him to come back. I hadn't known what being alone meant until that moment. Alone. Twelve stars over my head, smooth stone round me, dark water under me. And I could feel the chill creeping into my legs as I paddled to keep afloat. Move. Move. Keep warm. Keep floating. How long had Maria stayed like this? And Hollis beside her? It had been true after all. They had gone together. But not the way I thought. Not the way . . .

My mind wasn't working. Only floating. Smooth stone. I clawed at it and my fingers slipped on the scum of weed that covered it as if I was clawing at wet glass.

There was someone shouting. "Pavone! Dina! Dina!" Shouting. Who was it shouting? And then I realised that it was my own voice. Dina. I wouldn't ever see her again. The hair springing dark from the white forehead the way Maria's had. The face that was Maria's face, and yet quite different. And the way she'd smiled, as if she wasn't used to smiling. A man could be happy teaching her to smile.

I couldn't feel my legs any more. The cold was reaching high up, and my head was cold and empty as the moon. Nothing was sure any more except that very soon I would be dead.

The one reality was the well. Water and darkness and the pale circle of the stars. I saw Dina's face and tried to smile. Brightness like lamplight in the dark shaft. This is death, I thought. How quiet it comes.

"Are you there?" she was calling. "Are you alive?" She was crying, and I smiled in the imaginary brightness. I saw the rope falling, and watched it as if it was far away in another world.

"Dina," I whispered, "Dina." It was very strange.

"Oh, thank God," she said. "Thank God! Can you feel the rope? Can you get it under your arms?"

And suddenly the haze that had been settling on my brain lifted for a second, and I knew that this wasn't in my mind. It was real. I put my hands out and felt the rope, rough under my fingers. What would I do with it? It was such an effort to think. Too much effort.

"Under your arms," Dina was pleading. "The loop. Can you get it under your arms?"

I twisted in the water, struggling with the stiff wetness of the rope.

"Dina," I said. And it seemed I'd always known that one day

I would say that name. Nothing mattered except the name. Far up above me she-was crying, trying to tell me something, but I couldn't understand. Only lock my fingers on the rope. And the rope was moving. Stiff as a steel bar suddenly, and creaking upwards. I felt the water clinging at my waist. Reaching after me with cold, glass-smooth fingers, slipping from me inch by inch. At my knees. My feet.

And then the stars were very close. And Dina's face, white in the lamplight; the lamp like a bright moon on the parapet beside her, her teeth clenched with the effort of turning the iron handle that wound up the rope. Then my face was almost on a level with hers, three feet away.

"Can you reach the parapet?" she said.

I smiled at her. "Oh please," she whispered. "Try to understand." I could feel something warm running down the side of my face, into the corner of my mouth. Warm and salt: blood. And I wondered vaguely where it came from. "Please," Dina was begging me. "Oh please; he may come back again. He's only gone in to make sure the money is safe. Try to reach me with one hand."

She leaned far over the well towards me and I held out my hand to her. Then her hands were gripping my wrist and I thought I was falling again and tried to cling to the rope, crying with fear while she dragged me to safety on the parapet.

I still don't know how she got me over those three feet of space. She doesn't know herself. I only remember lying half across the narrow wall and then falling slowly to the ground. First my head and shoulders, then my body. And being dragged somewhere. A voice whispering, "Stay there. Don't move. You're hidden now. I'll come back as soon as I can with the police." Then darkness again, so warm and quiet, with the smell of straw all round me. So quiet.

When I woke it was daylight, although the green blinds were drawn against the sun. I watched the light flickering on the white walls like golden shadows. "Dina," I said. "Where is Dina?"

Someone moved beside the bed and I thought they touched my hand. "Is that you?" I said, but before the answer came I was asleep again, deep under soft coverlets of darkness.

They told me afterwards I was like that for seven days. And that Dina stayed with me for all of them, so that I shouldn't be afraid when I woke. Because she knew what being afraid was, and how you can wake to terror in the darkness.

And then I woke one afternoon and suddenly I was quite

clear in the head. I couldn't understand why I felt so weak, and why I could barely move my hands on the sheet.

"Dina," I said, and my voice sounded so thin and small it was like someone else speaking.

She moved so that I could see her, and took one of my hands. "It's all right," she said. "You're getting better."

"Where is . . . your uncle?" I whispered.

"In the asylum," she said. "Don't try to talk. When I brought the police back to the farm he was still counting the money, crying and laughing over it, dividing it into piles. 'One for Maria,' he'd say. 'One for the Americano.' They think he'll always be like that now. But before they took him away the police made him show where he'd buried them. In the vineyard. I am having a stone put up for them there, and when you are better you shall come and see it. Very soon now."

But it was longer than that. Almost two months before my skull where Pavone had hit me was healed enough for the hospital to let me go. "And you should convalesce somewhere for another month," they told me. "Somewhere quiet and easy."

But first I wanted to see Dina, and the farm, and the grave. Dina had had to go back to the farm long before, and I'd only seen her on Sundays.

It was a Friday when they let me go, and I didn't tell her that I was coming, just let the taxi bring me, and put me down a hundred yards from the gate.

"Wait there with my bag," I said. "Maybe I'll be going back to town." Because even then I didn't know. It's too easy to fall in love when you're lying sick in hospital. And she hadn't ever said that she loved me. She was just kind. And I was over thirty and too old for her. I felt fifty, walking in the open for the first time since I'd been up. My head was hurting again and I was sorry that I'd come. She might even not be here.

I turned into the yard, trying not to look at the well, and a woman I'd never seen was at the kitchen window, her arms white with flour from baking. What was a stranger doing here? A middle-aged woman, with a fat ruddy face under black hair.

"The Americano?" she shouted through the window, and almost before I could nod she was shouting again, her big red face breaking into enormous winks and smiles. "Miss Dina! Miss Dina! Guess who's here! Guess who's just come in the gate."

And suddenly the sunlit yard was full of sound, bustle, laughter, and running feet. Dina was flying across the worn cobbles, holding me at arms' length and smiling at me through what looked like tears.

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming?" she said. "Angela, look at him. See how thin he is. We'll have to feed him and feed him, like a turkey for Natale. Angela's my cook," she said, laughing and shaking me softly to and fro. "My cook, and my friend, and my helper. You know that the farm is mine now? All it needs is a man."

And suddenly we were both laughing, and the yard was full of sunlight and there were no shadows in it, not even by the well.

"Is it possible, signorina, that one may rent a room in the farmhouse for a short period, say a lifetime?" I whispered.

And Dina whispered the answer back to me, close against my cheek.

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★ ★ ★

SUBORDINATE CLAWS

Scorpions are generally graceful and decorative, even though their appearance may be a little alarming. The sight of these dignified creatures performing the curious and long-drawn-out rituals of their courtship parade has fascinated those people who have been lucky enough to witness it. In the spring, a small measure of animation gradually invades the colonies, and at night the scorpions leave their shelters and take a little exercise.

Gradually they become more energetic and soon the scene, according to Fabre, becomes almost one of revelry, with scorpions hurrying enthusiastically into the light of his lantern from every side, meeting, retreating, tumbling over each other and extricating themselves in a flurry of wildly waving tails. Fabre and his family watched in fascination night after night. . .

He was particularly intrigued by a spectacle he saw with increasing frequency as the season advanced. A pair of scorpions would meet face to face, and instead of withdrawing they would rear themselves up on the front part of their bodies until they were almost upright. Then their tails, held very erect, would come together and appear to exchange gentle caresses.

After a moment, the two would flop down again and scurry silently away.

"This was the mutual teasing of a betrothed couple," he says. "To declare his flame, the scorpion stands on his head." The season advanced and passion was no longer satisfied by these inconclusive exchanges. At the end of April Fabre . . . saw that two scorpions, face to face, claw clasped in claw, were solemnly parading up and down the enclosure.

NESTA PAIN, *Grassblade Jungle*

FALLEN ANGEL

His fingers closed on air
as he sailed past the trapeze

BY EVAN HUNTER

HE FIRST came in one morning while I was making out the payroll for my small circus. We were pulling up stakes, ready to roll on to the next town, and I was bent over the books, writing down what I was paying everybody. Maybe that is why I did not hear the door open. When I looked up, this long lanky fellow was standing there, and the door was shut tight behind him.

I looked at the door, and then I looked at him. He had a thin face with a narrow moustache, and black hair on his head that was sort of wild and sticking up in spots. He had brown eyes and a funny, twisted sort of mouth, with very white teeth which he was showing me at the moment.

"Mr. Mullins?" he asked.

"Yes," I said, because that is my name. Not Moon Mullins, which a lot of the fellows jokingly call me, but Anthony Mullins. And that's my real name, with no attempt to sound showman-like; a good name, you will admit. "I am busy."

"I won't take much time," he said very softly. He walked over to the desk with a smooth, sideward step as if he was on greased ball-bearings.

"No matter how much time you will take," I said, "I am still busy."

"My name is Sam Angeli," he said.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. Angeli," I told him. "My name is Anthony Mullins, and I am sorry you must be running along so quickly, but—"

"I'm a trapeze artiste," he said.

"We already have three trapeze artistes," I informed him, "all excellent performers, and the budget does not call for another of—"

"They are not Sam Angeli," he said, smiling and touching his chest with his thumb.

"That is true," I answered. "They are, in alphabetical order: Sue Ellen Bradley, Arthur Farnings, Edward the Great."

"But not Sam Angeli," he repeated softly.

"No," I said. "It would be difficult to call them all Sam Angeli, since they are not even related; and even if they were related it is unlikely they would all have the same name—even if they were triplets, which they are not."

"*I* am Sam Angeli," he said.

"So I have gathered. But I already have three—"

"I'm better," he said flatly.

"I have never met a trapeze artiste who was not better than every other trapeze artiste in the world," I said.

"In my case it happens to be true," he said.

I nodded and said nothing. I chewed my cigar a while and went back to my books. When I looked up he was still standing there, smiling.

"Look, my friend," I said, "I am earnestly sorry there is no opening for you, but—"

"Why not watch me a little?"

"I am too busy."

"It'll take five minutes. Your big top is still standing. Just watch me up there for a few minutes, that's all."

"My friend, what would be the point? I already have—"

"You can take your books with you, Mr. Mullins; you will not be sorry."

I looked at him again, and he stared at me levelly; he had a deep, almost blazing way of staring that made me believe I would really not be sorry if I watched him perform. Besides, I could take the books with me.

"All right," I said, "but we're only wasting each other's time."

"I've got all the time in the world," he answered.

We went outside, and sure enough the big top was still standing, so I bawled out Warren for being so slow to get a show on the road, and then this Angeli and I went inside. He looked up at the trapeze, and I said very sarcastically, "Is that high enough for you?"

He shrugged, looked up, and said, "I've been higher, my friend. Much higher." He dropped his eyes to the ground then, and I saw that the net had already been taken down.

"This exhibition will have to be postponed," I informed him. "There is no net."

"I don't need a net," he answered.

"No?"

"No."

"Do you plan to break your neck under one of my tops? I am warning you that my insurance doesn't cover—"

"I won't break my neck," Angeli said. "Sit down."

I shrugged and sat down, thinking it was his neck and not mine, and hoping Dr. Lipsky was not drunk as usual. I opened the books on my lap and set to work, and he walked across the top and started climbing up to the trapeze. I got involved with the figures.

Finally he yelled, "O.K.; you ready?"

"I'm ready," I said.

I looked up to where he was sitting on one trapeze, holding the bar of the other trapeze in his big hands.

"Here's the idea," he yelled down. He had to yell because he was a good hundred feet in the air. "I'll set the second trapeze swinging, and then I'll put the one I'm on in motion. Then I'll jump from one trapeze to the other one. Understand?"

"I understand," I yelled back. I'm a quiet man by nature, and I have never liked yelling. Besides, he was about to do a very elementary trapeze routine so there was nothing to get excited and yell about.

He pushed out the second trapeze and it swung away in a nice clean arc. Then it came back and he shoved it out again, and it went farther and higher this time. He set his own trapeze in motion then, and both trapezes went swinging round up there, back and forth, back and forth, higher and higher.

He stood up on the bar and watched the second trapeze, timing himself, and then he shouted down, "I'll do a somersault to make it interesting."

"Go ahead," I said.

"Here I go."

His trapeze came back and started forward, and the second trapeze reached the end of its arc and started back. I saw him bend a little from the knees, calculating his timing, and then he leapt off, his head ducked under and he went into the somersault.

He did a nice clean roll and he stretched out his hands for the bar of the second trapeze, but the bar was nowhere near him. His fingers closed on air, and my eyes popped wide open as he sailed past the trapeze and then started a nose dive for the ground.

I jumped to my feet with my mouth open, remembering there was no net under him, and thinking of the mess he was going to make all over my tent. I watched him fall like a bullet, and then I closed my eyes as he came closer to the ground. I clenched my fists and waited for the crash. Then the crash came, and there was a deathly silence in the tent afterwards.

I sighed and opened my eyes.

Sam Angeli got up and casually brushed the sawdust from his clothes. "How d'you like it?" he asked.

I stood stiff as a board and stared at him. "You're—you're—" I stammered.

"How d'you like it?" he repeated.

"Dr. Lipsky!" I shouted. "Come quick!"

"No need for a doctor," Angeli said, smiling and walking over to me. "How d'you like the fall?"

"The—*the fall?* I—I—*you mean—?*"

"The fall," Angeli said, smiling. "Looked like the real McCoy, didn't it?"

"Wh-what do you mean?"

"Well, you don't think I missed that bar accidentally, do you? I mean, after all, that's a kid stunt."

"You—you fell on purpose?" I gulped and stared at him, but all his bones seemed to be in the right places, and there was no blood on him anywhere.

"Sure," he said. "My speciality. I've thought it out, Mr. Mullins. Do you know why people like to watch trapeze acts? Not because there's any skill or art attached. Oh no." He smiled and his eyes glowed; I watched him, still amazed. "They like to watch because they are inherently evil, Mr. Mullins. They watch because they think that fool up there is going to fall and break his neck, and they want to be around *when he does it.*"

Angeli nodded. "I worked it all out."

"You—you did?"

"I did. I reckoned that if customers wanted to see me fall, then I would fall. So I practised falling."

"You—you did?"

"I did. First I fell out of bed, and then I fell from a first-storey window, and then I fell off the roof. And then I took my biggest fall, the fall that— But I'm boring you. The point is, I can fall from any place now. In fact, that trapeze of yours is rather low."

"Rather low," I repeated softly.

"Yes."

"What's up?" Dr. Lipsky shouted, rushing into the tent, his shirt-tails flapping. "What happened, Moon?"

"Nothing," I said, wagging my head. "Nothing, Doc."

"Then why d'you—?"

"I wanted to tell you," I said slowly, "that I've just hired a new trapeze artiste."

"Huh?" Dr. Lipsky said, drunk as usual . . .

We rolled on to the next town, and I introduced Angeli to

my other trapeze artistes: Sue Ellen, Farnings, and Edward the Great. I was a younger man at that time, and I have always had an eye for good legs in tights, and Sue Ellen had them all right. She also had blonde hair and big blue eyes. When I introduced her to Angeli those eyes went all over him, and I began to wonder if I hadn't made a mistake hiring him.

I told them I wanted Angeli to have exclusive use of the tent that afternoon, and all the afternoon I sat and watched him while he jumped for trapezes and missed and went flying down on his nose or his head or his back or whatever he landed on.

I kept watching him when he landed, but the sawdust always came up around him like a big cloud, and I never could see what he did inside that cloud.

All I know is that he got up every time, and he brushed himself off, and each time I went over to him and expected to find a hundred broken bones and maybe a fractured skull, but each time he just stood up with that handsome smile on his face as if he hadn't just fallen from away up there.

"This is amazing," I told him. "This is almost supernatural!"

"I know," he said.

"We'll start you tonight," I said, getting excited about it now. "Can you start tonight?"

"I can start any time," he said.

"Sam Angeli," I announced, spreading my hand across the air as if I was spelling it out in lights. "Sam Angeli, the—" I paused and let my hand drop. "That's terrible," I said.

"I know," Angeli answered. "But I've worked that out."

"What?"

"A name for me. I've found that, too."

"And what's the name?" I asked.

"The Fallen Angel," he said.

There wasn't much of a crowd that night. Sue Ellen, Farnings, and Edward the Great went up there and did their routines, but they were playing to cold fish, and you could have put all the applause they got into a sardine tin. Except mine. Whenever I saw Sue Ellen, I clapped my heart out, and I never cared what the crowd was doing.

I went out after Edward the Great wound up his act, and I said, "Ladieeees and Gen-tulmennnn, it gives me great pleasure to introduce on this occasion, his première, for the first time in this country, the Fallen Angel!"

I don't know what I expected, but no one so much as batted an eyelid.

"You will note," I said, "that the nets are now being removed from beneath the trapezes, and that the trapezes are being raised to the uppermost portion of the tent. The Fallen Angel will perform at a height of one hundred and fifty feet above the ground, without benefit of a net, performing his death-defying feats of skill for your satisfaction."

The crowd rumbled a little, but you could see they still weren't very excited about it all.

"And now," I shouted, "the Fallen Angel!"

Angeli came into the ring, long and thin, muscular in his red tights, the sequins shining so that they could almost blind you. He began climbing up to the bars, and everyone watched him, a little bored by now with all these trapeze acts. Angeli hopped aboard and worked out a little, swinging to and fro, leaping from one trapeze to another, doing a few difficult stunts.

He looked down to the band then, and Charlie started a roll on the drums, and I shouted into my megaphone, "And now, a blood-chilling, spine-tingling, double somersault from one moving trapeze to another at one hundred and fifty feet above the ground—*without a net!*"

The crowd leaned forward a little, the way they always will when a snare drum starts rolling. Angeli set the bars in motion, and then he tensed, with all the spotlights on him. The drum kept going, and Angeli leapt into space. He rolled over once, twice, and then his arms came out straight for the bar. His hands clutched nothing, and he started to fall.

A woman screamed, and now the crowd was on its feet, a shocked roar leaping from four hundred throats all together. Angeli dropped and dropped and dropped. Women covered their eyes and screamed and brave men turned away. Then he hit the sawdust, and the cloud rolled up around him, and an "Ohhhhhhh" went up from the crowd. They kept standing, shocked, silent, like a group of pall-bearers.

Then suddenly, casually, the Fallen Angel got to his feet and brushed off his red-sequined costume. He turned to the crowd and smiled, a big happy smile, and then he turned to face the other half of the tent, smiling again, extending his arms and hands to his public, almost as if silently saying, "My children! My nice children!"

The crowd cheered and whistled and shouted and stamped, and some men yelled, "Bravo! Bravolissimo!" or something like that.

Sue Ellen, standing next to me, sighed and said, "Tony, he's wonderful."

I heard her, and I heard the yells of Encore! out there, but I

didn't bring Angeli out again that night. I tucked him away and then waited for the landslide.

The landslide came the next night. We were playing in a small town, but I think everyone who could walk turned out for the show. They fidgeted through all the acts, crowding the tent, standing in the back, shoving and pushing. They were bored when my aerial artistes went on, but the boredom was good because they were all waiting for the Fallen Angel, all waiting to see if the reports about him were true.

When I introduced him, there was no applause. There was only an awful hush. Angeli came out and climbed up to the bars and then began doing his tricks again, and everyone waited, having heard that he took his fall during the double somersault.

But Angeli was a supreme showman, and he realised the value of his trick lay in its surprise element. So he didn't wait for the double somersault this time. He simply swung out one trapeze and then made a leap for it, right in the middle of his other routine stunts, only this time he missed, and down he dropped with the crowd screaming to their feet.

A lot of people missed the fall, and that was the idea, because those same people came back the next night, and Angeli never did it the same way twice. He'd fall in the middle of his act, or at the end, or once he fell the first time he jumped for the trapeze. Another time he didn't fall at all during the act, and then, as he was coming down the ladder, he missed a rung and down he came, and the crowd screamed.

And Angeli would come to me after each performance. His eyes would glow, and he'd say, "Did you hear them, Tony? They want me to fall, they want me to break my neck!"

And maybe they did. Or maybe they were just very happy to see him get up after he fell, safe and sound. Whatever it was, it was wonderful. Business was booming, and I began thinking of getting some new tops, and maybe a wild animal act.

I boosted everybody's salary, and I began taking a larger cut myself, and I was finally ready to ask Sue Ellen something I'd wanted to ask her for a long long time. Sam Angeli had made it all possible. I spoke to her alone one night, over by the stakes where the elephants were tied.

"Sue Ellen," I said, "there's something that's been on my mind for a long time now."

"What is it, Tony?" she said.

"Well, I'm just a smalltime circus man, and I never had much money, you know, and so I never had the right. But things have picked up considerably, and—"

"Don't, Tony," she said.

I opened my eyes wide. "I beg your pardon, Sue Ellen?"

"Don't ask me. Maybe it could have been, and maybe it couldn't. But no more now, Tony. Not since I met Sam. He's everything I want, Tony; can you understand that?"

"I suppose so," I said.

"I think I love him, Tony."

I nodded and said nothing.

"I'm awfully sorry," Sue Ellen said.

"If it makes you happy, honey—" I couldn't think of any way to finish it.

I started work in earnest. Maybe I should have fired Angeli on the spot, but you can't fire love, and that's what I was battling against. So instead I worked harder, and I tried not to see Sue Ellen around all the time.

I began to figure crowd reactions, and I realised the people would not stand still for my other aerial artistes once they got wind of the Fallen Angel. So we worked Farnings and Edward—whose "Great" title we dropped—into an act, and we worked Sue Ellen into Angeli's act. Sue Ellen dressed up the act a lot, and it gave Angeli someone to play around with up there, and it made his stunts before the fall more interesting.

Sue Ellen never did any of the fancy stuff. She just caught Angeli, or was caught by him—all stuff leading up to Angeli's spectacular fall. The beautiful part was that Sue Ellen never had to worry about timing. I mean, if she missed Angeli—so he fell. I thought about his fall a lot, and I tried to figure it out but I never could, and after a while I stopped figuring.

I never stopped thinking about Sue Ellen, though, and it hurt me a lot to watch her looking at him with those eyes full of worship, but if she was happy, that was all that counted.

And then I began to get bigger ideas. Why fool around with a smalltime circus? I wondered. Why not expand? Why not incorporate?

I sent off a few letters to the biggest circuses I knew of. I told them what I had, and I told them the boy was under exclusive contract to me, and I told them he would triple attendance, and I told them I was interested in joining circuses, becoming partners sort of, with the understanding that the Fallen Angel would come along with me.

I guess the word had then got around, because all the big-shot letters were very cordial and very nice; they all asked me when they could get a look at Angeli because they would certainly be interested in incorporating my fine little outfit on a partnership basis if my boy was all I claimed him to be, sincerely yours.

I sent off a few more letters, asking all the big shots to attend our regular Friday night performance so that they could judge the crowd reaction and see the Fallen Angel under actual working conditions. All my letters were answered with telegrams, and we set the ball rolling.

That Friday afternoon was pure bedlam.

There's always a million things happening around a circus, anyway, but this Friday everything seemed to pile up at once—like Fifi, our bareback rider, storming into the tent in her white ruffles.

"My horse!" she yelled, her brown eyes flashing. "My horse!"

"Is something wrong with him?" I asked.

"Is *something* wrong with him?" she ranted.

"Is something *wrong* with him?"

"No, nothing's wrong with him," she screamed. "But something's wrong with José Esperanza, and I'm going to wring his scrawny little neck unless—"

"Now easy, honey," I said, "just take it easy."

"I told him a bucket of *rye*. I did *not* say a bucket of oats. JuJu does not eat oats; he eats rye. And my safety and health and life depend on JuJu, and I will not have him eating some foul-smelling oats when I distinctly told José—"

"José!" I bellowed. "José Esperanza, come here."

José was a small Puerto Rican we'd picked up only recently. A nice young kid with big brown cow's eyes and a small, timid smile. He poked his head into the wagon and smiled, and then he saw Fifi and the smile dropped from his face.

"Is it true you gave JuJu oats, José, when you were told to give him rye?" I asked.

"Si, senor," José said, "that ees true."

"But why, José? Why on earth—?"

"I could not do eet, senor."

"You could not do what?"

José lowered his head. "The horse, senor; I like heem. He ees nice horse. He ees always good to me."

"What's that got to do with the bucket of rye?"

"Senor," José said pleadingly, "I did not want to get the horse drunk."

"Drunk? Drunk?"

"Si, senor, a bucket of rye. Even for a horse, thees ees a lot of wheesky. I did not theenk—"

"Oh," Fifi wailed, "of all the inexcusably— I'll feed the horse myself. I'll feed him myself. Never mind!"

She stormed out of the wagon, and José smiled sheepishly.

"I did wrong, senor?"

"No," I said. "You did all right, José. Now run along."

I shook my head and José left, and when I turned round Sam Angeli was standing there.

I hadn't heard him come in, and I wondered how long he'd been there, so I said, "A good kid, José."

"If you like good kids," Angeli answered.

"He'll go to heaven, that one," I said. "Mark my words."

Angeli smiled. "We'll see," he said. "I wanted to talk to you, Tony."

"Oh? What about?"

"About all these people coming tonight. The big shots, the ones coming to see me."

"What about them?"

"Nothing, Tony. But suppose—just suppose, mind you—suppose I didn't fall?"

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Just that. Suppose I don't fall tonight?"

"That's silly," I said. "You have to fall."

"Do I? Where does it say I have to fall?"

"Your contract. You signed a—"

"The contract doesn't say anything about my having to fall, Tony. Not a word."

"Well—say, what is this? A hold-up?"

"No. Nothing of the sort. I just got to thinking. If this works out tonight, Tony, you're going to be a big man. But what do I get out of it?"

"Do you want a salary rise? Is that it? O.K., you've got a rise. How's that?"

"I don't want a salary rise."

"What, then?"

"Something of very little importance. Something of no value whatever."

"What?" I said. "What is it?"

"Suppose we make a deal, Tony?" Angeli said. "Suppose we shake on it? If I fall tonight, I get this little something that I want."

"What's this little something that you want?"

"Is it a deal?"

"I have to know first."

"Well, let's forget it, then," Angeli said.

"Now wait a minute, wait a minute. Is this thing Sue Ellen?"

Angeli smiled. "I don't have to make a deal to get her, Tony."

"Well, is it money?"
"No. This thing has no value."
"Then why do you want it?"
"I collect them."
"And I've got one?"
"Yes."
"But it's not worth any money?"
"No, Tony. No money at all."
"Well, what—?"
"Is it a deal or isn't it?"
"I don't know. I mean, this is a peculiar way to—"
"Believe me, this thing is of no material value to you. You won't even know it's gone. But if I go through with my fall tonight, all I ask is that you give it to me. A handshake will be binding as far as I'm concerned."
"You sound as nuts as Fifi does," I said.
"A deal? If I fall, I get what I want."
I shrugged. "All right, all right, a deal. Provided you haven't misrepresented this thing, whatever it is. Provided it's not of material value to me."
"I haven't misrepresented it. Shall we shake, Tony?"
He extended his hand, and I took it. His eyes glowed, but his skin was very cold to the touch. I pulled my hand away.
"Now," I said, "what's this thing you want from me?"
Angeli smiled. "Your soul."

I was suddenly alone in the wagon.
I looked round but Angeli was gone, and then the door opened and Sue Ellen stepped in. She looked very grave and upset.
"I heard," she said. "Forgive me. I heard. I was listening outside. Tony, what are you going to do? What are *we* going to do?"
"Can it be?" I said. "Can it be, Sue Ellen? He looks just like you and me. How'd I get into this?"
"We've got to do something," Sue Ellen said. "Tony, we've got to stop him!"
We packed them in that night. They sat, and they stood, and they climbed all over the rafters; they were everywhere. And right down front, I sat with the big shots. They all watched my small, unimportant show until it was time for the Fallen Angel to go on.
I got up, smiled weakly, and said, "If you gentlemen will excuse me, I have to introduce the next act."
They all smiled back knowingly and nodded their heads, and their gold tiepins and pinky rings winked at me, and they blew

out expensive cigar smoke, and I was thinking, Mullins, you can blow out expensive cigar smoke, too, but you won't have any soul.

I introduced the act, and I was surprised to see all my aerial artistes run out on to the sawdust: Sue Ellen, Farnings, Edward, and the Fallen Angel. I watched Angeli as he crossed one of the spotlights, and if I'd had any doubts they all vanished right then. Angeli cast no shadow on to the sawdust.

I watched in amazement as the entire troupe went up the ladder to the trapezes. There was a smile on Angeli's face, but Sue Ellen and the rest had tight, set mouths.

They did a few stunts. I watched the big shots, and it was plain they were not impressed at all by these routine aerial acrobatics. I signalled the band, according to schedule, and I shouted, " And now, ladies and gentlemen, the Fallen Angel in a death-defying, spine-tingling, bloodcurdling triple somersault at one hundred and fifty feet above the ground, *without a net!* "

Sue Ellen swung her trapeze out, and Angeli swung his. Then Sue Ellen dropped head downwards and extended her hands, and Angeli swung back and forth. The crowd held its breath, waiting for him to take his fall, and the big shots held their breaths, waiting for the same thing. Only I knew what would happen if he did take that fall. Only I knew about our agreement. Only I—and Sue Ellen, waiting up there for Angeli to jump.

Charlie started the roll on his snare, and then the roll stopped abruptly. Angeli released his grip on the bar and he swung out into space, and over he went, once, twice, three times—and *slap.*

Sue Ellen's hands clamped round his wrists, and she held on for dear life. I couldn't see Angeli's face from so far below, but he seemed to be struggling to get away. Sue Ellen held him for just an instant, just long enough for Edward to swing his trapeze into position. She flipped Angeli out then, and over he went and *wham.* Edward grabbed his ankles.

Angeli flapped his arms and kicked his legs, trying to get free, but Edward—Edward the Great! —wouldn't drop him. Instead he swung his trapeze back and then gave Angeli a flip, and Farnings grabbed Angeli's wrists.

Farnings flipped Angeli up and Sue Ellen caught him, and then Sue Ellen swung her trapeze all the way back and tossed Angeli to Edward, and I began to get the idea of what was going on up there.

Edward tossed Angeli and Farnings caught him, and then Farnings tossed him to Sue Ellen, and Sue Ellen tossed him right back again. Then Farnings climbed on to Sue Ellen's trapeze, and they both swung back to the platform.

Edward took a long swing, and then he tossed Angeli head over heels right back to the platform where Sue Ellen and Farnings grabbed him with four eager arms.

I was grinning all over by this time, and the crowd was booing at the top of their lungs. But who cared? The big shots were stirring restlessly, but they'd probably heard that Angeli sometimes fell coming down the ladder, so they didn't leave their seats.

Only tonight, Angeli wasn't doing any falling coming down any ladder. Because Sue Ellen had one of his wrists and Farnings had one of his ankles, and one was behind him, and the other was ahead of him; and even if he pitched himself off into space, he wouldn't have gone far, not with the grips they had on both him and the ladder.

I saw the big shots get up and throw away their cigars, and then everybody began booing as if they wanted to tear down the top with their voices. Angeli came over to me, and his face didn't hold a pleasant smile this time. His face was enraged, and it turned red as if he would explode.

"You tricked me!" he screamed. "You tricked me!"

"Oh, go to hell," I told him, and all at once he wasn't there.

Well, I don't run the greatest show on earth, I've just got a small, unimportant circus, and it gives me a regular small income, but it's also a lot of trouble sometimes.

I still have my soul, though; and, what's more, I now have a soulmate, and she answers to the name of Sue Ellen Mullins, which is in a way most euphonic, you will agree.

© Evan Hunter 1960

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MEMO TO VELASQUEZ

She has been standing there
Three hundred years,
Erect, uncomplaining,
As befits her royalty,
Holding her little fan.
Surely you haven't forgotten
She's posing for you?
If you just slipped out
For a nip of wine,
Come back
You're ages overdue.

SHIRLEY GUMINA,
On The Infanta Margareta Theresa

A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

OLD MR. MARTIN

" It's no good jumping to conclusions," Superintendent Benjamin said

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

WHEN Bernard, the taxi driver who parked at the end of Gabriel Street and sometimes drove Inspector Petrella home, said to him, " I suppose you wooden fancy a ton of nice acid drops," Petrella thought for a moment that he was listening to a piece of south London slang.

Then he realised that Bernard was speaking comparatively literally.

" I was past ol' Martin's place this morning. The kids 'll miss him, won't they? "

" They certainly will," said Petrella. " And I'd like to get my hands on the thug who ran him down."

" Makes you wonder," said Bernard. " When you think of all the people around today we easily could spare. No one would worry much if a car ran into—" Bernard here named a number of people prominent in politics and the world of entertainment— " but no! He has to go and knock off an old boy like Sam Martin. Like I said, it makes you wonder what Providence is thinking about."

" Is Sam's shop up for sale, then? "

" That's right. By order of his executioners. Stock and all."

" I don't suppose Sam had all that stock left, the rate he gave it away," said Petrella.

Sam Martin, sole proprietor of Martins: Sweets and Confectionery, had been a figure known and respected beyond the immediate area of Southwark High Street and Friary Lane in which he had lived and carried on business for a decade and a half. A reporter on the local paper had christened him The Philanthropist of Friary Lane, and had run a story on him. His sweetshop had been a magnet to every boy and girl in the

neighbourhood, for Mr. Martin had a soft heart and a bad memory.

"Talk about taking candy from a blind man," said Bernard. "All any kid had to do was walk in, help himself, and say, 'Pay you Friday, Mr. Martin.' I wonder he ever had any money left to buy new stock at all."

By coincidence the subject of old Mr. Martin cropped up again on the following morning, when Superintendent Benjamin was paying one of his periodical visits to Gabriel Street.

"Nothing on that running down case in Friary Lane yet?" he said.

"Nothing at all, sir," said Petrella. "It's a bit of an odd business altogether. There's not a lot of traffic in the Lane. And there are too many corners in it for anyone to get up a lot of speed. This driver seems to have come round the corner fast, on the wrong side, and hit Mr. Martin in the back."

"Criminally careless driving."

"Almost more than that, sir. The nearside wheels of the car actually mounted the pavement."

Benjamin stared at him. "Are you making this out to be deliberate?" he said.

"It's difficult to say," said Petrella. "The road was damp, but there were no skid marks. The car could have pulled over quick to avoid a cat on the other side. It's the sort of daft thing drivers do. But it seems the car was going pretty fast. Maybe without lights."

"A getaway?" said Benjamin. "It's possible. But no consolation to Mr. Martin. I'd like to find out who did it, Patrick. He was a nice old man and well thought of round these parts."

"So I'm told," said Petrella, and at this precise moment the telephone rang.

For some moments he was unable to understand what was being said. When he had grasped the single essential point he interrupted his caller by replacing the receiver.

"It's a woman," he said. "Seems to be having hysterics."

"So I gathered. What's it all about?"

"I'll have to go down and see. Funny thing. You remember we were talking about Mr. Martin's place. Well, that's where she was ringing from. She's found something. In the cellar."

By the time Petrella reached the shop, Mrs. Barrow, a grey-haired, button-eyed lady of sixty, had recovered her composure sufficiently to tell him what had happened.

"Cleaning up was what I was doing," she said. "Mr. Warrender—he's the agent—told me, 'Scrub out each room careful. And be very particular to do the cellar.' That's what

he said. Very particular to do the cellar because, in old houses like this, cellars are where there are smells, and there's nothing puts a purchaser off like smells. That's what Mr. Warrender said."

By this time they had made their way through the little shop—the shelves stripped of stock, a few advertising cut-outs drooping from the walls, the till-drawer open and empty—and were standing by an open door at the head of a flight of narrow brick steps.

"You go first," said Mrs. Barrow. "I'll come with you and show you. After what happened I don't really fancy going down there again."

The cellar was lighted by a single electric bulb. By its economical yellow light Petrella could see that part of the floor had been washed. A pail of water stood beside it.

"I could feel the bricks were loose right under my hands," said Mrs. Barrow. "Several of them. So I thought—"

"You thought," said Petrella, going down on one knee, "Here's where old Mr. Martin kept his cash box, with all his spare cash in it. So I'd better dig it up and hand it over to the police before anyone dishonest gets hold of it. Right?"

As he spoke he was busy lifting and piling the loose bricks. Underneath, the cement had fallen away in the centre, leaving a long shallow depression. And at the top end of the depression he saw at once what had caught Mrs. Barrow's eye.

Dr. Summerson, the Home Office Pathologist, made his report *personally to Petrella three days later.*

"It's an interesting case," he said. "One of the most interesting I've ever dealt with. And I've still got a lot more work to do on it. But I can give you one or two facts to be going on with, if you like. It was a woman. Not less than twenty-five, not more than thirty-five. Height, five foot six, give her an inch either way. Bad teeth. Two wanted filling and one with a broken cap. And she may have had arthritis in her left hip."

"How long has she been there?"

Dr. Summerson said, "After all that time it's impossible to be accurate to a year or so. But my guess would be at least fifteen—perhaps twenty—"

Petrella's face fell.

"Twenty years old," he said. "I'm surprised you were able to give us anything at all."

"Height's easy enough," said Summerson. "We found an undamaged right humerus. Apply Pearson's formula, it gives you quite an accurate result, you know."

"I suppose so," said Petrella, who had no idea what Pearson's formula was. "What about age?"

"More difficult, I admit. You can tell a certain amount from the bones, and a bit more from an X-ray of the bone fusions. It gets more difficult as the bones get older. That's why I gave you a bracket of ten years. The dental work's the only reliable method of identification after a lapse of time like that."

"If we can find her dentist. And if he's hung on to his records."

"That's your job, not mine," said Dr. Summerson. "However, that wasn't what I really came to tell you. There was something rather more important." He put his hand in his coat pocket and pulled out a small glass specimen case which he laid on the table.

"Do you know what this is?"

Petrella looked at the tiny white fragment. It was clearly a piece of bone of some sort, roughly the size and shape of a match but broader and flatter.

"No idea," he said.

"A number of quite experienced doctors, if they were honest, would say the same." He opened the box, picked up the bone fragment delicately, and laid it on his palm under the light.

"It's the upper horn of the wing of the voice-box. And the interesting part about it is that it has been fractured about a third of the way up. You don't need a glass to see that."

"No," said Petrella. "I can see it's been broken. What does it mean?"

"It means," said Dr. Summerson, "that although this young woman has been fifteen or twenty years in her grave, it is quite clear *how* she died. She was strangled. Probably, though not absolutely certainly, by manual strangulation."

"Twenty years!" said Benjamin, when the news reached him. "Who had the house before Martin?"

"It used to be a barber's shop," said Petrella. "A one man show. I've found out his name, and that's about all I have found out. Harry Foster. He started up in the mid thirties. As far as I can gather, it was never much of a place, always on the verge of closing down. Then the war came. That can't have done it much good, either. But Foster didn't finally give up until the autumn of 1944. That was when his wife was killed. The flying bomb that wiped out the Pantheon Cinema at Balham."

"I remember it," said Benjamin. "A direct hit. About ninety dead. Not a great many of them were identified, really. The building caught fire after the bomb hit it."

"So I gathered," said Petrella.

The two men looked at each other. "No good jumping to conclusions," said Benjamin. "I'll try to find out from Central if there's an insurance angle to this. That's the sort of thing they can do better than us. You see if you can find out where Foster is now."

Sixteen years is not a long time in the life of officialdom, but it is long enough for files to be put away in boxes, and boxes to be placed in remote storage depots. It is long enough for senior officials to retire and for the memories of junior officials to fade.

It was therefore some little time after the moment when Mrs. Barrow lifted a loose brick out of the cellar of No. 36 Friary Lane that two things happened. Superintendent Benjamin received a letter from the Claims Manager of the South-Eastern Insurance Company confirming that seven hundred and twelve pounds had been paid to Mr. Harold Foster on 10th December 1944 in respect of a policy on the life of his wife, Merlith Foster, who had been killed by enemy action on 2nd October 1944. And on the same day Petrella finally ran Mr. Foster to earth.

It had been a search which got nowhere at all until Petrella had the idea of calling on old Mr. Martin's lawyers. They had produced to him the original deed conveying the shop in Friary Lane to Mr. Martin. It had been signed by Harold Elwin Foster. And the signature had been witnessed by an Agnes Marion, described as a spinster.

Miss Marion was, happily, still alive and remembered Mr. Foster and his wife quite well. In 1944 she had been living next door to them in Friary Lane. She had also, it transpired, run into Mr. Foster subsequently. She couldn't just remember when, but it was well after the end of the war. They had talked for a few minutes, and Mr. Foster had revealed that he had set up shop again, this time in north London, in Highside.

No news could have been more welcome. Petrella had served as a constable and sergeant in the Highside Division, so co-operation was assured. It was badly needed.

On the face of it, it should have been easy to trace a man, of whom they already had a description, thought to be operating a barber's shop in a known area of north London. In practice, it proved curiously difficult. There seemed to be a lot of barbers, mostly in their middle fifties, and mostly born Londoners. In the end, Petrella packed Miss Marion into a police car and took her on a tour of the likeliest prospects.

It was at their second call, a modest establishment functioning under the name of J. Walker, Gents Hair Stylist, that they found him.

"That's him," said Miss Marion. "That big nose. Like a bird. The Albatross, my sister and I used to call him. Do you want me to go back in and say hullo? Wouldn't he be surprised?"

"I think we won't surprise him just yet," said Petrella. He helped Miss Marion back into the car. "I'll get the driver to take you home. And I can't say how grateful I am."

"What's he done?" said Miss Marion. "He must have done something. You wouldn't bring me half across London in a car if it wasn't important, would you?"

Petrella said, "If I told you he had done something, would you be surprised?"

"Not really," said Miss Marion. "He was friendly, you know, with me and my sister. But it didn't stop him trying to borrow money from us. He was that sort of man. Always enough money for smokes and drinks, but never enough to pay his bills."

"He doesn't seem to be doing terribly well now," said Petrella. Indeed, Mr. Walker's shop was a dismal little place.

Petrella gave the police driver directions. As the car started to move, Miss Marion poked her head out of the window and said, "Good-bye. And I haven't overlooked it."

"Overlooked what?" said Petrella incautiously.

"That you've wriggled out of answering my question." Miss Marion waved her hand and the car drew away.

When it had disappeared round the corner, Petrella went into the shop. He was overdue for a haircut, anyway.

Two days later, Petrella, Superintendent Benjamin, and young Mr. Meakin from the Public Prosecutor's Office discussed Mr. Walker, alias Foster.

"There's not a lot to go on," said Benjamin. "Lots of people change their names. Nothing criminal in that. All the same, I don't see that we can leave it where it is."

"We daren't," said Petrella. "He's married again. At least, he's living with some woman. We haven't found out whether they're married or not. There seems to be a bit of doubt about that."

"You've met her, Patrick?"

"I've said good morning to her. A nice motherly woman. Five or ten years younger than Foster. We don't want her to end up under the cellar floor, do we?"

"But good heavens," said Mr. Meakin, "what reason have you to suppose—?"

"If what we're all thinking is right," said Benjamin, "the first Mrs. Foster didn't die in an air raid at all. Her husband strangled her and buried her in the cellar. We must suppose he did it because he was desperate for the money. He couldn't

even sell the house and clear out until he'd paid some of his debts. Now it looks as if he's beginning to be hard up again. He got away with it once."

"What evidence is there," said Mr. Meakin, "that the corpse in the cellar was Mrs. Foster?"

"Only presumption, I agree. She was twenty-eight and, according to her dressmaker's records, was five foot four inches. That's close enough to Summerson's estimate."

Petrella said, "Could we bring him down for questioning?"

"I don't think anyone could criticise you for that," said Mr. Meakin. "After all, a corpse has been found in a house previously owned by him. I don't see that he could object to being questioned."

Benjamin looked at Petrella, who said, "I'll go myself, sir. I think it'll be better that way."

It was four o'clock when he opened the door of Mr. Walker's shop. A youth with the look of an apprentice rose unwillingly from his chair, put down the comic he was reading, and stubbed out a cigarette.

"Relax," said Petrella. "I don't want a haircut. Just a word with Mrs. Walker."

"She's in the back," said the youth.

Petrella went through the net-curtained, glass-panelled door, and found himself in the living-room. Mrs. Walker looked up from her ironing and smiled uncertainly.

"Is your husband in?" said Petrella.

"Well, no," said Mrs. Walker. "He isn't. What can I do for you? Didn't I see you in the shop a day or two ago?"

"That's right." Petrella produced his warrant card and said, "I'm a Detective Inspector, and I wanted a word with your husband."

Mrs. Walker sat down abruptly, and there was a moment of silence in that shabby little room.

Then she said, "He's out just now. Shall I tell him—? What shall I tell him it's about?"

"I'd better have a word with him myself," said Petrella. "When do you expect him back?"

Mrs. Walker looked vaguely at the clock on the mantelshelf and said, "Oh, about an hour. It might be more."

"No point in me waiting, then," said Petrella. "I'll look in this evening."

"You do that." Mrs. Walker was no actress.

Before going, Petrella took a quick look out into the garden. The walls were high. There were other houses on both sides

and no evidence of a back way out. He went out through the shop. The youth, still deep in his comic, hardly looked up.

Petrella turned right, walked down the road, turned left, left again, and then once more to the left. He was now at the opposite end of the road, with a clear view of the shop door.

As he waited, dusk fell. From time to time he stamped his feet gently. At six o'clock the shop door opened, but it was only the boy going home. Tired, no doubt, by his strenuous afternoon. Half past six. Seven o'clock.

Once Petrella thought he heard raised voices from inside the shop, but concluded that it was his imagination.

Then the door opened and Mr. Walker came out.

His big face showed white under the street lamp. He swung on his feet and lurched off up the pavement. Petrella followed discreetly.

His guess had been that Mr. Walker would bolt. But Mr. Walker had had plenty of time to pack a bag, yet he was carrying nothing. He was wearing a thin raincoat and no hat. And he was walking in the slow aimless style of a man with time to kill.

They were climbing. Each of the little streets had an upward tilt to it. Petrella realised why when they emerged on the road which spans the Archway. He also realised what Mr. Walker's destination might be, and hastened his pace.

The sound of his steps seemed to galvanise Mr. Walker. He cast a startled look over his shoulder, ran a few shambling paces, and pulled himself up on the parapet of the arch. Petrella hurled himself forward, grabbed the raincoat belt, then the raincoat itself.

Sixty feet below them the steady procession of headlights swept past. Up on the Archway the two men were alone under the black sky. Petrella slid his arms forward until they were locked round Mr. Walker's waist.

" Not that way," he said.

" We're holding him," said Petrella, " on a charge of attempted suicide. He'll probably deny it. I'm the only witness."

" And he'll almost certainly be allowed bail," said Benjamin. " If we are going to spring this thing on him it's a pity, in a way, that he's had a night to think about it. Better get on with it."

When Mr. Walker was brought in, it was clear that whatever else he might have done during the long night in the cells, he had not slept. The dead white skin, the yellow eyes with the deep black smudges under them, the great beaky nose, teased Petrella with a recollection.

Then he remembered Miss Marion. " The Albatross, my

sister and I used to call him." The likeness was almost startling.

"Mr. Walker," said Benjamin, who believed in the attack direct, "is it right you changed your name towards the end of the war?"

"Nothing wrong in that," muttered Walker.

"Nothing at all. Previously you used the name of Foster. Is that right? And had a shop at 36 Friary Lane, that you sold some time in 1944 to a Mr. Martin?"

"That's right."

"You were living there, before you sold the shop, with your wife?"

No doubt about it, thought Petrella. The reaction was sharp and positive.

"Yes," said Walker at last. "With my wife."

"Who died as the result of enemy action on 2nd October that year."

Petrella thought at first that Walker was not going to answer. Then he made a noise which might have been interpreted as, "Yes."

"Did you yourself identify the body, Mr. Walker?"

This time there was no answer. He's going to faint, thought Petrella, and started to get up. Then he saw that tears were trickling down Mr. Walker's cheeks. Benjamin waved him back. After what seemed a very long time Mr. Walker spoke.

"So you know," he said. "I guessed you did when you sent a man round to my house yesterday. I told Merlith that you must have found out. That's why I—"

Petrella felt a very faint prickle at the back of his scalp. Benjamin's eye dared him to say anything.

Mr. Walker said, "It seemed to be the only thing I could do. It was wrong, of course. I see that. But if I'd been killed, my own insurance would have paid, and Merlith could have put the money back."

"We'd better be quite clear about this," said Benjamin. "The present Mrs. Walker is the woman who lived with you in Friary Lane as Mrs. Foster."

"She's my wife. I've never had but the one."

"And, of course, she wasn't killed in the Pantheon Cinema."

"She'd planned to go there that afternoon. She told a lot of people she was going." Walker was talking more fluently now. The relief of confessing had eased his tongue. "But at the last moment she was called up north. Her mother was dying. When the bomb hit the cinema, people jumped to the conclusion she'd been there. And I saw a chance of picking up the insurance money."

" So you telephoned her to keep away, and started up life again in north London when the fuss had died down."

" That's right. We just took out identity cards in our new names. It seemed quite easy in the war. All you had to do was tell them the new name—"

Benjamin looked at Petrella. Before both of them loomed large the unasked, unanswerable question.

The telephone rang.

Benjamin picked it up, said, " In a minute, we're busy." Then, " Oh. In that case—just hang on a minute." He cupped one hand over the mouthpiece.

Petrella interpreted this correctly, and said to the uniformed policeman who had been sitting quietly in the corner, making notes, " Would you take Mr. Walker back now."

As soon as the door had shut behind them, Benjamin removed his hand and said grimly, " Go on, please." And finally, " All right, we'll both come down at once."

Then he replaced the receiver slowly, almost reverently, in its cradle.

" That was Mr. Enwright," he said. " He's the builder that old Mr. Martin's executors have put in to do a few repairs at the shop. They wanted to smarten it up a bit before they put it on the market."

" Yes? " said Petrella.

" His men have found four more bodies under the floor of the cellar."

" All girls," said Dr. Summerson. " One's been there about ten or twelve years, two round about five, and one's comparatively recent. One of them is certainly negroid. And one, though less certainly, an East European. The most recent one has only been there, perhaps, six months. I've done most work on her, and I should think there's no doubt she was a prostitute. Which would seem to suggest that perhaps all the others were as well."

He paused for a moment, then added, " They had all been strangled."

" Four prostitutes. Perhaps five," said Benjamin. " One of them black. One a Pole."

" The most recent one," said Petrella, " was she, by any chance, quite a tall girl? Unusually tall, I mean."

" That's right," said Dr. Summerson. " Why? "

" I was thinking that she might be Linda. You remember her? Benny Light's girl."

" It could be," said Benjamin. " It could easily be. And it

should be easy to check. She had a record, so we've got all her details." He paused, and then said rather helplessly, "Have you any idea—any idea at all—what all this is about?"

It was a measure of the shock to which he had been subjected that he should not only have asked his subordinate's opinion, but asked for it in front of a third party.

"If it turns out," said Petrella slowly, "that they *are*, all of them, prostitutes, I suppose the only solution is that old Mr. Martin lured them in at considerable intervals and killed them. They wouldn't be afraid of him, you see. A nice old man like Martin."

"But why?"

"For their money, I should think, sir, wouldn't you? All those girls carry wads of money about. Stones, too, sometimes. They've really got nowhere else safe to put them. And *if* the last one was Linda, it looks as if it was Benny who knocked off Mr. Martin. A run-down in a stolen car. It's got his mark all over it."

"Old Mr. Martin," said Superintendent Benjamin helplessly. "I did wonder just how he got his money. He can't have made a penny out of that shop of his. He used to give most of his sweets away to the kids."

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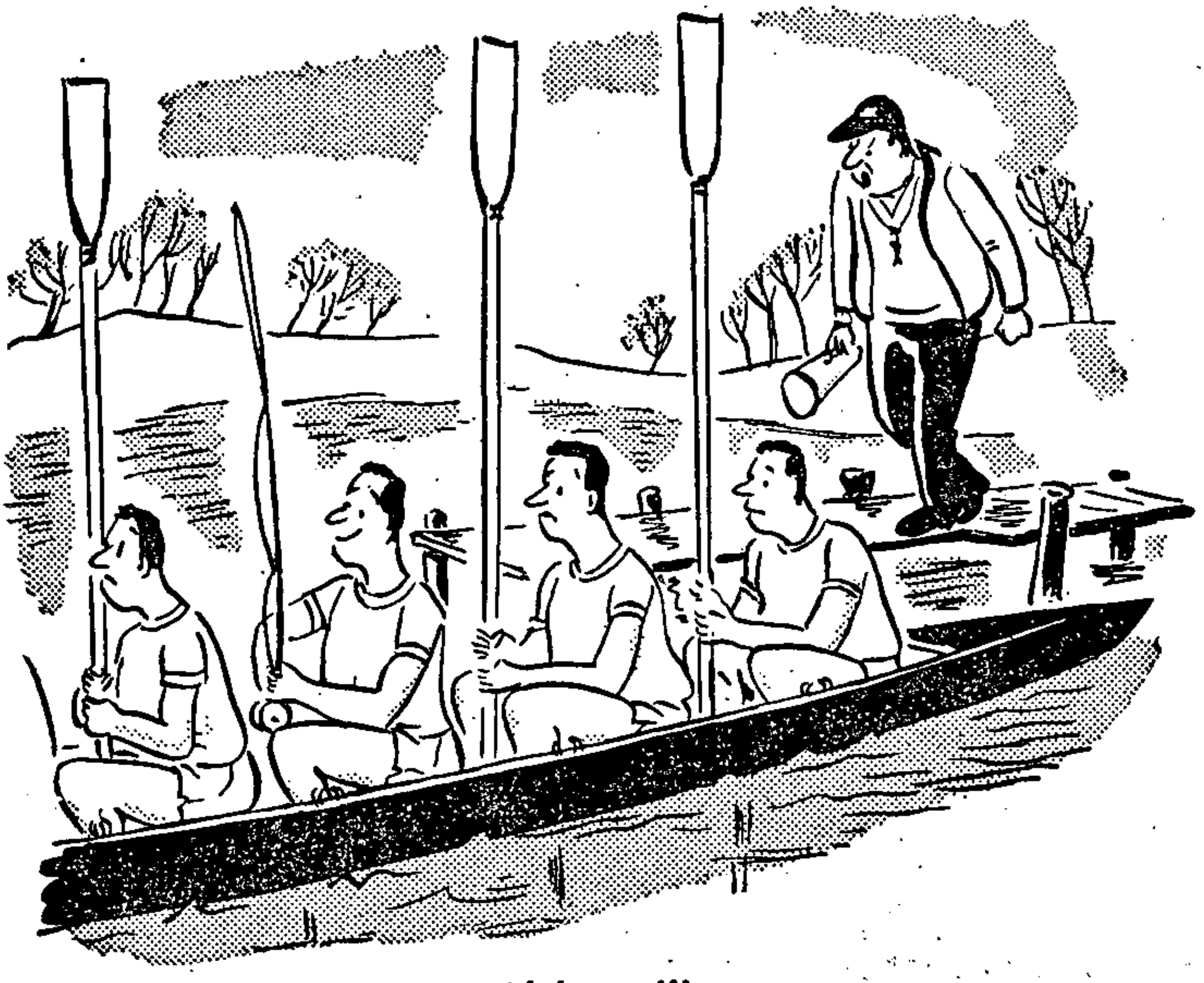

"Johnson!"

LITTLE FRONTIER

They faced one another across the line

BY D. SLEIGHTHOLME

RORY went back to his house, the house of his boyhood, and looked at the ghost which it had become. The woods had come nearer, and there was a green flood that washed in a torrent of leaf and tendril round the walls and lapped into the doorways. He pushed the front door a little way and the rust crackled from the hinges. He didn't go inside.

He stood in the waist-high grass of the lawn and let the pictures and the voices take him. It was high summer. The insects twanged like tiny elastic bands and a woodpigeon murmured. It was all round him, the shouting and the laughter. The insects and the bird seemed less real.

" All right, ghosts," Rory said aloud, " I'm the only one left of you all and I'm back home again." Then he felt a faint sense of absurdity for his moment of melodrama.

He turned back to the narrow lane that led away up the hill to where there were other houses and people, beyond the wild heathland. For a long time he had wrestled with the idea of return. He was aware of what it would mean to go back alone to start again. The house held all his boyhood like some old album of photographs found in an attic.

He was afraid to turn the pages, and yet there was the contact and the continuity. It was his house. Twenty years of wandering separated him from the moment when he had left the house and the busy, vital life of a family.

He remembered habits and jokes and the old, sweet irritation of parental indulgence, and they were vivid because they were intact when he left them. · It had all gone now, but he still half expected the cat to balance along the garden wall and his father to rumble his barrow out of the shed.

Rory was back to start again. The rest was gone and it was no use waiting . . .

Rory was a tall man, or he seemed tall. He was in his mid thirties and hardened by a hard life. In his face, which made no concessions to good looks, there was little to see of his real character unless it were the lines round his mouth. A tolerant

mouth, fond of laughter. His eyes were narrowed from long habit, his cheeks thin, and he had more lines on them than his age warranted.

He was back again within a month, his possessions loaded on a handcart. He walked along the straight stretch of the lane, where it dipped down through the pines to the house, as the last of the sun slanted over the hill. He saw the house as a soft pink face looking at him, but when he got closer the windows were blank eyes, sightless. He wanted to re-enter the house with the light and the sun behind him, not stumbling in shadow.

He had no fear of the empty darkness there, but the house was asleep and he wanted to wake it his own way. Rory unrolled his bedding on the edge of the lane in the hedgerow.

For an hour he smoked his pipe; then he lay down and pulled the blanket round him. The moon was half waned; the house became black and a part of the trees. There was one window alone that showed; it was in the low wing behind the old box hedge. Rory wondered at it, trying to work out how the moon made the window into a pale, shining square in the blackness. He fell asleep wondering . . .

It was like the old days when he woke. The dew was on the hedges and his blankets sparkled with it. There was sunlight hovering in the air and shafts of it low through the trees. The air hung motionless with the silent prelude to a hot summer day. Rory could almost imagine again the thrill of camping, with the kettle whistling to call them in to breakfast.

He filled his pipe and lit it, puffing the smoke luxuriously. It hung on the bright air in layers, blue as hills.

The door gave to his thrust and squeaked faintly. There was a remembered rattle from the handle. The hall was bare of furniture. The jackals had stripped the house of all that was movable and Rory was glad. The house he could furnish again. Chairs and beds carry the living stamp of people, and he wanted the memory not the mould of their bodies.

There was the scar on the wall his bicycle had scraped so many years ago. He remembered his mother's voice, "Oh Rory, Rory." The voice came down the years like a whisper in a tunnel, "Rory, Rory, Rory . . ."

In the living-room, ivy overhung the window and made a green gloom there and patterned the floor with pennies of sunlight. Dust lay thick everywhere; the stairs were hollow-sounding; and on the landing reposed the bones of a small bird. Rory climbed to the attic, once his own room. Instinctively he dipped his head at the low beam that crossed from the chimney breast. In the low window, spiders had sewn a thick

mat of web, and flies had swarmed there leaving their dead like little paper embers.

He walked from room to room. There was a broken stool, a transfer still stuck to the bathroom wall, an old slipper. Everywhere the house was silent, and the birdsong outside was distant.

He went back on his tracks opening windows, forcing back the greenery, letting in the sun and the clean, living air, then he went down again and opened the door to the kitchen.

He stopped, the handle in his hand, and suddenly anger began to rise in his throat.

The air was warm, there was no dust, the windows were clear of cobwebs. Everywhere there was the smell of living. Water in a bucket. A biscuit tin. Pots and pans, clean and shining.

On an impulse Rory went quickly through to the outside wing and the backdoor opened easily to his push. The door to the wing was open. He strode into the great single room with its frescoes and delicate plaster. There was a bed, a poor affair made of an old door and boxes, a suitcase, a book or two.

For a second into Rory's mind came the nursery tale of the three bears. It came and went through the mist of his anger. The desecration of his house. The snapping of the spell. It was as though, in a moment, what had been sacred and secret to him had become shared by a stranger.

Hearing a small sound from the doorway, Rory looked up.

The girl stood quite motionless. The sun was behind her, and her shadow reached over the bare floor to him. He saw that her face was heart-shaped, her hair falling loose. Her eyes were lifted at the corners, her mouth the same, but now her lips were apart.

They stared at one another.

Rory broke the silence. He pointed at the bed. "This yours?" She nodded.

"You're a squatter, then?"

The girl frowned inquiringly.

"You've got no right here; you'd better pack this stuff up and get moving." She still stood in the doorway, staring.

"You heard me," Rory said.

She seemed to come out of a trance. She went to the bed and began to roll up the blankets. Her movements were listless as if she had become suddenly tired.

Rory watched her. "Who are you, anyway?" he asked.

She spoke without turning her head, "It's not matter," she said. "I go."

He wondered what nationality she was. There was a familiarity about her—or was it her mood? Then he knew. He remembered the long slow-moving columns, the prams, and the endlessly-marching people going heaven alone knew where, but always going.

Rory felt the anger draining out of him, compassion taking its place. He struggled against it, wanting to stay firm in his determination to keep his house sacred to the things that were familiar and established, but his resolve wavered.

"How long were you reckoning to stay here?" he asked.

The girl went on parcelling up her belongings. "A month," she said. "Then I go and make some pounds; then I come again to live; then I go again for pounds."

Rory smiled to himself. "If you like to keep out of my hair," he said, "if you keep to the wing and don't get in my way, you may as well stay."

The girl's hand paused, holding a book which she was about to drop into the case, then she hurled it in and swung round. Her face was taut with fury. "No," she said fiercely. "It is finish. Always I come to here and there was peace and nobody. Now you say I can stay so that I must say, 'Thank you.' Do you know how it is? I am always from little girl moving and moving. Then there is kindness and the people who give me. The old, kind women with the black shoes, and always the cuppa tea and the kindness. They give and give and give.

"Afterwards I am feeling, 'No more please. No more giving. I want to work.' But they say, 'Oh girl, you must work like this where it is made for you.' I want to make for my life with what I have." She paused, waiting for him to say something.

Rory stood uncomfortably silent.

"Then I have found this little house," she went on. "I do not say any more thank you. Oh yes, I say, 'Thank you, house, for dry;' and 'Thank you, bird, for tune'—but not to people."

Rory blew harshly through his pipe. He was annoyed. "It's too damned bad, isn't it?" he said. He tapped out the pipe against his heel.

"You put filthy on the floor."

"I'll do as I damn well please," he said. He stared at her thoughtfully. "What you don't seem to realise is that there are other people in this world. You're so busy being little Nell all alone—"

"Is not my name."

"I don't give a hoot what your name is. Don't interrupt. I came here looking for peace, too. I wanted quiet and shelter. What did I find?"

"You were—"

"Oh, for God's sake, shut up, woman. I found a yapping mid European who destroyed any peace there might have been around here as effectively as a Works Band." Rory paused.

The girl sat on the homemade bed with her hands in her lap and her feet neatly together as if she was watching a show. She looked at him oddly. "You know, I think maybe you are just a tramper only. I think you are not a landlord coming in, eh?"

"I'm landlord enough for you," Rory said loudly.

The girl ignored him. "Look at his dress, eh. Oh yes, I know you, mister. You want I go so that you shall have all of house, eh?"

She left her seat and suddenly, with a muscular energy that shocked him, she was pushing Rory outside. He was too taken aback to resist. She picked up a stone, and with it scratched a line across the path between the wing and the main building. "There," she said, "here is frontier now. I am live this side, you are live where you like."

"Now just one moment," Rory began.

She put her hands against his back and gently pushed him over the line. "Go off," she said.

They faced one another across the line.

"Well, this is bloody marvellous," Rory said. Then he began to laugh.

He spent the day cleaning the two lower rooms. He made a besom with a bundle of twigs and threw water about lavishly. The tide of dusty scum changed with successive scourings until the floors shone through with the warm red-and-gold of the pitch-pine planking. It took him most of the day. He stopped only once to eat, and he ate with the hurried champing of a man used to eating alone and unrestricted.

Later he went out into the woods with his axe and cut wood for the fire. He cut more than he realised. On an impulse he slung a few logs over the line outside the wing. The girl took them in silence. He thought, No thank-you's, I suppose.

There was a blackbird pink-pinking out in the dusk as Rory made up his bed on a pile of pine needles. He lit the hurricane lamp and cooked his supper at the kitchen fire.

Afterwards, when he had finished eating and his pipe was drawing to his satisfaction, he went to the door and listened to the gentle night sounds. Already he felt that he was a part of the old life again. He felt no decline of spirits at the approach of night—so often it is then that a man most needs company.

There is something about the blue dusk and the little night winds that lowers resistance. He felt nothing but a great sense of relaxation and gratitude.

He could see the girl moving about inside the door. The firelight was behind her, and the cotton dress she wore allowed free passage to the leaping, yellow light. He saw her body as plainly as if she was naked. He nodded to himself. He swore softly. "There will be that now," he said.

The morning was another gold-and-blue glory with birdsong and the whisper of trees filling his ears when he woke. After lighting the fire he made coffee. He was champing hugely at a slab of bread and marmalade when the girl came to the door, holding a half-empty tin of beans.

"Morning," Rory greeted her.

She smiled. It made her mouth particularly lovely, he thought. "I have too much bins," she said in her odd accent. "For you the bins, eh?"

"No thanks, no bins. I've already got past that course."

"But is good for on toast."

"Lady," Rory said, grinning, "I've had more bins on toast in my long life than you even know exist. Thanks, but I'd rather you had them."

She stood with the tin held out. Then she let her hand sink a little, still looking at it. She nodded once or twice, turned, and went back slowly, holding the little tin.

Rory sat with the grin fading on his face like drying soap. He sat like that for several moments; then he got up and kicked the pig-bucket clean across the room . . .

He saw nothing of her all day. Once he heard her crashing about in the overgrown kitchen garden, heard the chup and chink of a spade. She was gardening with devoted energy, he guessed. The sort of earnest dedication that one would expect from a woman with her background. Everything would be as damned earnest, he supposed.

He felt a slight resentment that into the peace of his world should come this question of emotions and feelings. The solitude he had planned seemed strangely distant.

But despite his resentment he found himself more free of the dull mirror of introspection which had for so long been held up to every thought and action. He was curious about the girl, too. It was not going to be possible, he knew, for the two of them to be oblivious of each other. Rory was no stranger to women, but he felt that this one possessed a strange quality which eluded him like the after-taste of a new wine.

He left it until supper-time. Then he made one thick piece of toast, and carried it round to the wing. A piece of string was stretched across above the line the girl had drawn. He ducked below it and tapped on her door.

After a moment she opened it a little way and looked out. Rory offered her the piece of toast.

She looked at it with great seriousness, then took it from him and said, "*Come into, please.*"

Rory sat on her bed and watched as she heated the little tin of beans for him. She did it with the applied concentration of a cordon bleu producing a speciality. He had not as yet had this chance to study the girl at his leisure.

She was, he guessed, about twenty-five. He also guessed her to be a Balkan of some sort. Her hands were slender, and her body lacked that functional robustness which comes from generations of brute work and childbearing.

She took the pan from the fire and spread the hot beans over the toast with the same serious concentration. She still made no comment as she handed it to him. Rory winked and began to eat. She watched him carefully. She was intently serious about it.

"What were you doing in the old garden today?" he asked.

"Oh, is good garden. Is potato, is bin, all things."

"Beans?"

She smiled. "I think you laugh about bin."

"There are twenty acres of land attached to this house," Rory said. "I remember when it was all under cultivation and growing fine crops—not that I know anything about that sort of -thing."

He was going to say that his father had cultivated the land, but for some reason he checked himself. He was silent, thinking of the way the land had looked when it was freshly turned, and the plough going up over the rise with the seagulls searching the furrows, white-scattered like a paperchase.

"You have been here many times?"

"Yes," Rory said. "I came here when I was a boy."

She was watching him, her head a little on one side. Her lips formed as if for speech, and then she stopped herself.

"How did you come across this place?" he asked.

"Oh, it was one year ago. I am walking. Then I see the house, and it is in the woods like an old woman who smiles; and I say, 'This is where I shall live,' and I come."

"You weren't nervous alone?"

"They have said me, 'Don't go that place, miss, is ghosts there.' I have say, 'I am ghost, you know.'"

"You can haunt me some night," Rory told her. She looked quickly at him, and he regretted the remark immediately . . .

The moments passed like days and the days like moments. A week went by and he came across the girl very little. One can live close to neighbours and never see them. It was like that with Rory and the girl. Each day came and went with easy, uninterrupted speed.

For Rory, there was so much to do that he took no account of time, working under the arc-light glare of the sun or in the green shade that was like water. He would stop only when hunger came upon him or when, suddenly shivering, he realised that the sun was down and the long shadows of the elms on the hill were reaching along the earth to touch his bare back with the first chill of night. At such times he would realise that he was tired and aching. The utter peace and satisfaction for which he had longed would envelop him, and he would light his fire and eat in its sleepy warmth.

In the first week he cleared the walls of dank greenery and unblocked the gutters, rehung doors, lifted the sagging roof of the porch, and replaced the tiles that had slipped from the roof.

Occasionally he would wave to the girl when he saw her busily working in the garden—her garden, as he found himself calling it. She made no move to invade his world and he left her to herself. It was as tacit an understanding as could be found.

Some evenings, when he stood in the blue dusk outside his door and smoked, she too would come out and just stand. They never spoke. At first he felt that the silence should be broken. He thought of a number of casual remarks and made none of them; the silence was good enough. He thought, I suppose that when people say things it is inevitable that sooner or later there must come disagreement, and then there is a ripple on the pool.

By the end of the second week the weather changed. A fine mist covered the sun, and a little wind came hunting through the woods, hissing like a snake, turning the aspen leaves so that they flickered like moths in flight. Rory was an Englishman: the change could not pass unremarked. As he emerged from his door the girl was shaking a blanket out of her window.

"Summer's over," Rory said.

"Aha," she said, "so mister tramper has remembered how to speak. Is now I show you my garden."

She had made the garden into a geometrical figure of lines and angles. Rows and plots of vegetables, platoons of bean sticks, neat lines of strawberries. The whole garden lived with a force of its own.

They walked side by side among the plots while she explained

what she had done and what she was planning for the future.

" Gardens are always in front of you. Like that there is no past times, only the planning. All time there is to think what must I do next, and always the growing and the living. Like that is good, eh? "

" Yes," Rory said. " Like that is good."

They were standing by the old wall at the end of the plot. It was crumbling and thick with ivy. " Where did you learn about gardens? " he asked her.

" Oh, when I am little, I am living on a big farm of my father. Always we are work with the men and learn. I have little garden only for me and my father has say, ' Each day you must learn one thing new, and each night you must say me what it is.' Like that I soon know oh so many thing. Now I remember, and when I make a little cabbage it is like long ago for me."

" You've got white from the wall on your back," Rory said. He dusted her, and felt the movement of her shoulders under his hand. He allowed his hand to remain. They stood in a new silence; she made no move to displace his hand. It was a long silence, with only the insects and the distant murmur of the woods. Then they heard a shout from the lane. The moment vanished.

" Look, is funny, there is a postman." She stood, frowning. " Why is postman here? Nobody lives here, we are ghosts."

" We'll see," Rory said. There was an odd feeling of alarm within him. It lodged in him like a stone as they walked up to the gate. Rory remembered the old postman.

He waved to Rory. " So you're back, then. I suppose I got to come trampin' down this damned old lane with every little postcard from now on, eh? " He handed Rory a letter, a buff-coloured, official envelope.

Rory took it absently. " I'll fix a box up the lane," he said.

When he turned, the girl was standing by the gate. Her face was oddly pale; she was smiling, but it was the sort of smile you see on a carnival mask—just an upturning of the mouth, a card-board smile. Her eyes were full and glistening. She was nodding to herself.

Rory realised quickly. There was no longer any secret about the house.

" Now look—" he began.

" Oh, was a good joke," she said. " Now I must pay some rents to you, eh? I go and earn some pounds; then I pay. Please, I will have the stamp on the receipt, mister landlord."

" Don't talk so damn stupid."

She turned and walked back to the house. She walked with

the familiar slope-shouldered trudge of the eternal refugee.

At the house she untied the string which had divided their two territories. Rory watched her. He felt beaten by her. He supposed that it should matter very little to him whether she came or went. It had not mattered before, when pity had made up his mind for him.

Was anything altered? Rory wasn't sure. He just knew that he didn't want her to go, and he also knew that it was useless to argue now. He shrank from another scene. There was a lethargy upon him which made the idea of juggling words somehow futile. He went into his own part of the house, the letter in his hand still unopened. He noticed vaguely that it was beginning to rain.

Rory didn't see her go. He stayed in the big room. He watched the rain rattling against the windows. Through them the view became distorted as the water ran and picked its way down the glass. He saw the woods swaying like ferns, and it could have been the distortion or it could have been the wind which had risen. He thought, I could stop her, I could get her back. Then he thought, Why? Do I just want her to be around? Is it the woman of her I'm after?

The great peace had gone sour on him, that much he knew. The belief in his ability to hold his own universe in his hands and draw on no one for his salvation or his succour had gone.

For the first time in his life he felt that the house—his house—was empty. It rang with emptiness. The silence crept out of the walls, and the doors slammed in the wind.

She has taken the house with her, Rory thought. She has left me the empty shell, but the house has followed her as if it was a dog.

It was only after a long hour that he remembered the letter. He opened the envelope at the window where there was light to see. When he had read it he crumpled it and threw it into the empty fireplace. Then he thought a bit, and went to retrieve it.

"Well," he shouted, "so all right then, you Ministerial bastards! You don't know it, but you've started something now. My God, you have!"

He grabbed his coat from the peg behind the door and crashed out into the tearing rain, head down against the wind, coat-tails flapping. He started off up the long lane in search of the woman who had tipped his universe over his head.

He ran through the rain. There was a good chance he could catch her before she left the village. Trains were few and buses infrequent.

She'll come back, he told himself. Perhaps not for me, but

ıer land will bring her back; she would never let those black-ɔoated busybodies take the land away from the house. If they ɜay it must be farmed then farmed it shall be; she would under-ɜtand that. The need to find her and bring her back rose in him with every step he took. He knew what he had been trying not to know—that he had to have her, and that without her he was a ɜtranger in his own house.

His feet slammed along the rutted lane.

At the station he inquired for her. The booking clerk shook his head. "No, sir. No young ladies, no foreign young women."

Rory turned with a brief word of thanks and made for the bus stop. The dusk had come early and the street lights were haloed by the driving rain. At the bus stop he saw that there had been no bus for the past three hours, and the next one was not expected until late evening. He felt the hope begin to die in him.

There were still teashops, shelters. He dismissed the thought as soon as it came. He knew that this girl, once filled with the determination to go, would get a lift or go on foot.

So that was that, he thought. He walked slowly back to the station porch and stood there to think. Up the street, the windows of houses shone out on the wet night and cast pools of yellow light into the gutter. It was a waste, losing their warm light that way, Rory mused. If they knew how a man might long for the light of such a window they would hoard it like the gold it was.

The walk back was an evil dream.

The wind was a mad thing out in the open country. It slashed against his face like a whip, so that his forehead felt bound by an iron clamp. His shoes were pulp, his clothes clung to his thighs as he walked. The trees in the gale bellowed like animals, and the night was blacker than all hell.

There was a bend in the lane before it turned for the last stage to the house. It was there that in daylight you got your first sight of it. Rory turned the bend and stood stock still. He saw the long black turbulence of the woods and low against it, like a nugget deep in black earth, a lighted window. He began to run.

She was standing in the rain. She was as soaked as he was himself. She held out her arms to him, not speaking.

Rory held her close, feeling her wet hair against his cheek.

He noticed then that the light was in his room; her half of the house was dark.

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★ ★ ★

I feel sorry for men—they have more problems than women. In the first place they have to compete with women.

FRANCOISE SAGAN

Cherry pie

For he on honey-dew hath fed . . .

COLERIDGE, *Kubla Khan*

Can she make a cherry pie, Billy boy, Billy boy?
Can she make a cherry pie, charming Billy?
She can make a cherry pie, quick's a cat can wink her eye,
And me Nancy's kittled me fancy, oh, me charming Nancy Grey.

ANON

Corn-fed Chicken

Léa used to rouse Chéri from sleep to cram him with strawberries and cream, frothy milk, and corn-fed chicken. With wide, vacant eyes, as though dazed, he would sit at dinner watching the mazy motions of the moths round the bowl of roses, and then look at his wristwatch to see whether the time had come to go to bed . . .

She went to bed mercifully early, so that Chéri—after nuzzling against her till he had hollowed out a selfishly comfortable position—might get some sleep. Sometimes, when the lamp was out, she would watch a pool of moonlight shimmering over the polished floor, or listen, through the chorus of rustling aspens and shrilling crickets, unceasing by night or day, to the deep, retriever-like sighs that rose from Chéri's breast.

"Why can't I go to sleep? Is there something wrong with me?" she vaguely wondered. "It's not this boy's head on my shoulder—I've held heavier. The weather's wonderful. I've ordered him a good plate of porridge for tomorrow. Already his ribs stick out less. Then why can't I go to sleep?"

COLETTE, *Chéri*

Love Feast

When she carries food to the table and stoops down
—Doing this out of love—and lays soup with its good
Tickling smell, or fry winking from the fire
And I look up, perhaps from a book I am reading
Or other work: there is an importance of beauty
Which can't be accounted for by there and then,
And attacks me, but not separately from the welcome
Of the food, or the grace of her arms . . .

Whether in the bringing of flowers or the food
She offers plenty, and is part of plenty,
And whether I see her stooping, or leaning with the flowers,
What she does is ages old, and she is not simply,
No, but lovely in that way.

BERNARD SPENCER, *Part of Plenty*.

Serious Matters

" You can cook for me. Sometimes we shall have a house and you'll clean it and cook wonderful food. Sometimes you shall cook in the open."

" You don't know one dish from another. You eat when you're hungry and if the food's hot and there's enough salt in it and it's cooked tender, you think it's good. That's not cooking."

" But I know something else. This . . . and this . . . and what we've just done . . . you think that's what making love is . . . you think *those* are good. And they are—so good—but they aren't all of making love, madame. Oh no. I could teach you about making love and you could teach me about food. I like to eat. I could take it very seriously."

" I could take making love very seriously."

ELISABETH AYRTON, *The Cook's Tale*

Simple Stew

There is an old cabin hidden in the heart of the hills,
And there I'd go to dwell with my true love
Away from crowds, and listen to the boggy rills,
And watch the brave birds and the brassy sky above,
And hear the telegraph wires that talk in trills
When the wind blows, cooing like a dying dove.

And I would go a-shepherding, leaning on my stave,
Calling wild calls from my crags as from a minaret,
And you would boil me peaty water for my morning shave
And dry sweet bilberry leaves to be my cigarette,
And we should keep a cow in a draughty cave
In the hollow in the heart of the hills where our cabin is set.

And we should have a geranium and half a bed of phlox,
And a yew tree by the harsh wind sideways blown,
And you would sit at the window and darn my socks
And make a stew of an old discovered bone;
Far from the sad world, in the hollow of the rocks,
You and I should grow old and happy and live and die alone.

R. P. LISTER, *The Cabin in the Hills*

Land of Spices

And when he had kissed her, he sat her up on the kitchen table to talk to her for a few moments; Joan was blissfully happy, and terrified that Bess or one of the maids would come in at any moment and find her in this undignified position . . . He stood beside the table, his arm round Joan's waist, while she settled herself more comfortably against him and begged him to let her get down.

The kitchen, and all the lower part of the house, was full of a sugary, spicy smell, for three great hams had been cooked in preparation for the wedding dinner, stuck all over with cloves and basted with brown sugar; and a great spice cake had been baked, full of almonds and raisins and currants and candied peel. These, except for some cold game pies, were the only articles that could be prepared so long ahead.

The sweet smell of the may tree under which he had first kissed her, and the delicious odours of food in the great kitchen, and Joan's hair, which had nature's own perfume like that of new-mown hay, were all in Alleyn's mind together as a part of the happiness of his love.

ELIZABETH JENKINS, *The Phoenix' Nest*

KNIFE IN THE NIGHT

His eyes, narrowed to slits,
were fixed on the red-edged blade.

BY KEN HARDMAN

IT MUST be safe to kill him now, thought the boy. He shifted his grip on the long tapering galley-knife, feeling the wooden handle bite into his sweating palm.

Beyond the ventilator behind which he crouched, the red eye of a cigarette winked fitfully in the darkness, sparks streaming from it across the star-flecked face of the sea. He could just make out the huge bulk of the man standing smoking against the pale whiteness of the ship's rail. The familiar outline of the hated figure brought a rash of moist fear to the boy's forehead, and his slim, almost naked body quivered with fury.

The figure lounged negligently against the rail, one foot raised on the lowest rung, elbows resting on the top rail, looking out across the whispering emptiness of water to the barely discernible horizon.

The muted thump of the engine seemed to shout, "Now, now!" and the boy tensed in an agony of screaming nerves, the knife a terrible weight in his hand.

One quick thrust, one quick heave, and the man would be over the side, going down in the black water beneath the churning screw, his leering mouth closed for ever.

But even as he raised himself on his toes, the boy knew he had waited too long. The cigarette end curved a graceful glowing arc in the night and the man turned from the rail.

"Come out from behind there, boy," he said softly.

The menace in his voice caught at the boy's throat like a tangible thing, choking out a sob. He looked wildly round for a way of escape, but there was none; he could run no farther than the length of the ship, and this man would surely follow. Numbly he stumbled out to face him, the knife still hanging in his hand, useless and forgotten below the level of his work-stained khaki shorts.

"So, if it ain't me favourite little deck boy." As the man took

a pace forward, a shaft of light from an open doorway picked out his bald, gross head. His tongue coiled slowly round thick lips like an obscene pink snake, and his black button eyes danced with unholy glee. " And what did you think you were doing, skulking behind there? "

The boy swallowed painfully. " Nothing, Bosun," he said, his voice uncertain with terror. " I was just having a breath of air before—before—" He quavered to a stop.

" Before sticking that knife into me, eh? Y'know, I'd never have thought you had the guts. But then, you didn't in the end, did you? "

The boy looked down stupidly at the knife as if seeing it for the first time. With a quick movement of revulsion, he dropped it clattering on to the steel deck. " I—I didn't—"

" No, you didn't do it." The man still spoke softly. " Now I wonder why? Just think, boy; you might have been a murderer at sixteen. What a headline that would have made at home! I can see it now: BOY SEAMAN MURDERS BOATSWAIN IN MID OCEAN." He laughed, a small rasping sound.

" And what would your defence be, boy? Tormented beyond endurance? How's that? Hardly an excuse for murder, though. No, the courts wouldn't go for that. Or perhaps you expected to get clean away with it? Yes, that's it, ain't it, boy? Shove me over the side and no one the wiser."

He advanced another slow step, out of the shaft of light, so that he was a squat, dark bulk before the trembling boy.

" You little bloody fool! " His arm swung up from waist level with deceptive slowness, and an open hand the size of a dinner plate caught the boy on the side of the head, knocking him sideways against the ventilator.

" That's only the beginning, boy." The man was breathing hard through his nostrils, as if he had been running. " Don't you know better than try to jump me? I've got eyes in the back of me head—that's how I've lasted. How long you been on this ship, kid? "

The blow had steadied the boy a little. He fingered his swelling ear as the fury began to mount again within him. " Three months," he said, his downcast eyes searching the blackness round his feet.

" Aye—and you reckon I've given you a hard time in those three months, don't you? But, by God—" the bosun thrust his face close to the boy's bent head—" it'll seem like a holiday compared to what I'll give you from now on. Look up when I speak to you, kid! " His broad palm slapped under the boy's chin, snapping back his fair curly head.

But the boy had seen what he wanted. Less than a yard away from his sandalled feet the faint starlight glinted dully on the knife blade.

"And this is going to be a lovely long trip," the bosun continued, "so we might have another year or so together. Won't that be nice, now?"

The boy gazed fascinated at the broad neckless shape before him. This isn't human, he thought disjointedly; this is an ape, an animal to be destroyed as soon as possible. He felt a sudden desire to find out if there was any humanity at all in the creature.

"Why do you treat me like this, Bosun?" he asked thickly. "I do my job. Why are you on to me all the time?"

The bosun was confused by the question. "Why—why—" he repeated dully. Then he laughed softly. "Because I like to, boy, that's why. I don't like pretty boys, they stick in me craw. And don't try to talk your way out of the beating you're in for."

A vague understanding stirred in the boy's head, so elusive that he had to strive to put it into words. "You're jealous, Bosun," he said wonderingly. "Jealous because I'm young; you're old and—and ugly. Yes, that must be it."

With an inarticulate cry, the bosun leapt forward, his tree-like arms extended in a blind desire to crush the life from the slim upstart before him.

Lithe as a panther, the boy ducked and sidestepped in the same movement, his trailing hand sweeping along the deck in the direction of the knife. He found it, blade first, and his hand closed in a tight reflex. A shock of power flooded through him as he whirled round, the knife transferred to his other hand, its foot-long blade already dark with his own blood and poised like a separate murderous entity.

The bosun stumbled to a halt, inches from the knife point. His arms dropped slowly and the first scent of his animal fear was in the air.

The crouching boy laughed shudderingly. "Well, Bosun," he taunted, "what are you waiting for?"

He made a small flicking movement with the knife and the bosun shuffled back half a pace, back into the light of the doorway. His face was puffy and slack-mouthed, the eyes narrowed to slits and fixed on the red-edged knife blade following him into the yellow light. His hand came up involuntarily, as if to ward it off.

"Got it again, have you?" His harsh laugh was unconvincing. "Lord help you if you so much as touch me with that thing."

The boy said nothing; but the knife was rock-steady in his hand, the blood pulsed through his tightly-clenched fingers and dripped steadily on to the deck.

The bosun thrust his head forward, striving to see the boy's face. "Why don't you pack up?" he snarled. "You tried once —and you just ain't got the guts."

Still the boy did not speak.

"What's the matter with you—gonna stand there all night?" The bosun shuffled forward an inch, so that the knife point grated against the loose folds of his shirt. "Give it to me an' we'll say no more about this." His hand came up again slowly, feeling for the blade.

Like a darting tongue, the knife-edge whipped along his forearm from wrist to elbow, opening up a thin hairline that hesitated in surprise before welling darkly with blood. A sharp, tearing wheeze sprang from the bosun's throat. "You little bastard," he croaked, his voice rising in shocked pain.

Panic such as he had rarely felt swept over him. Suddenly he knew he was getting old and slow, and that he would not be able to get hold of the boy before the knife tore deep into his bowels.

"You don't know what you're doing. Here, kid," he said, wheedling, "put it away an' let's forget this, eh?"

The boy's continued silence unnerved him. "Well, for pity's sake, say something!"

The boy laughed again, an odd wild sound compounded of fear and power. "I couldn't do it before, because your back was turned." His voice trembled, high-pitched with tension.

"But now it's different." The knife snaked out, a silver streak followed by a thin, corded brown arm.

The bosun leapt back, shrieking as he felt the knife rip through his shirt and scratch along his belly. Briefly and with startling clarity, he saw the end; there would be no mercy from this kid, nor from the cold steel. The menacing steel seemed to become part of the boy as though his very lifeblood flowed into it from his gashed hand. With a sobbing grunt the bosun spun round and ran, stumbling, down the deck, his loose sandals slapping madly against his heels.

The boy straightened slowly, drawing his bleeding hand across his forehead. He tried to stop himself from giggling hysterically as the tension left his body. Swaying a little, he wiped the knife carefully on his shorts.

It might be useful another day.

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LEGAL TRAPPINGS

In no other country in the world would a mouse invoke the protection of the law.

MR. GORDON JONES, *in a Portsmouth court*

SAPPHIRE MINK

She was young—and known to be most sweetly featherbrained

BY MARY STOLZ

MRS. JAMES BARRET had what her lover, Phillip, called a baby-blue expression. Gentle, biddable, very pretty, it was the only expression she possessed. It lay over her features like a veil of thin silk and kept everyone, including Mrs. Barret, from knowing what she actually felt.

For some months, Mrs. Barret had been meeting Phillip in out-of-the-way places, dressed—as he insisted—in a sort of meek disguise. He had made her wear a hat and forbidden her to wear her sapphire mink coat. If he'd had his way, she'd have worn glasses, too. He asked too much.

"You'll make me so strange and dull," she had told him, "you'll end by forgetting you love me at all."

"Impossible, my sweet," he had whispered, in the gloom of a bar that wasn't seedy enough to be chic. "I could never forget that." He'd added in a voice caught between pride and resentment, "I don't believe you really have any idea how far that expression of yours could take you."

Mrs. Barret felt she'd gone as far as she wanted to—into the arms of Phillip. And she had met him, as bidden, almost unadorned, in second-rate hotels and bars and restaurants where no one they knew would dream of going. Then all meetings stopped when Phillip decided on the horrid thing they must do...

For a month of unobservable but unending anguish, she hadn't seen his thin, brooding face, hadn't heard his voice, which touched her like a brand, hadn't felt his adored hands. She was so filled with longing and desire that this morning, with James out of town, she decided to brave the utterly forbidden and ring Phillip at the office. She would disguise her voice somehow so that the girl on the switchboard wouldn't recognise it.

Twice that morning she went to the telephone and each time Raynder, their tall, handsome, impeccably correct butler, loomed at her elbow, offering to obtain the number for her. She backed away, frightened, making the flimsiest of excuses.

Mrs. Barret realised that she didn't know how to disguise her

voice. She could almost hear the telephonist's surprised, "Why, Mrs. Barret! What can we do for you?" Because James, the senior partner at the law office of Barret, Twining, & Moore, was out of town, and Mr. Phillip Weaver wasn't even on the letterhead.

Yet, thought Mrs. Barret, with gentle implacability. He isn't on it *yet*. So why should Mrs. Barret be telephoning Mr. Weaver? She could think of no reason at all.

If she'd had a definable philosophy, she might have expressed it in Phillip's phrase as, "Be adorable, my sweet, and let who will be clever." But now Mrs. Barret wished desperately that she could be clever, just for a little while. Not brilliant. Just smart enough, just long enough, to think out a way to see Phillip.

There *must* be a way, she told herself. I can't stand this all alone, never hearing from him, never seeing him or touching him.

She felt a rising wave of anger that would have astounded Phillip, James, and anyone who knew her. Fury rose and rose like a tide strewn with wreckage, and threatened to overwhelm her and all that she and Phillip had planned.

Stumbling to a chair, she fell into it, shaken with confusion. These bursts of almost blind rage, known only to herself and long ago to her parents, had grown worse in this month of frustrating separation from Phillip.

She couldn't ring him at home because his sister might answer; or at the office because her voice would certainly be recognised. Nor could she write to him at either place. She couldn't plan to meet him by deliberate accident in the park, because who might pass by and see them?

She'd been forbidden to go to parties where there was a chance of encountering him.

"Because, my sweet," Phillip had said, in that tone of arrogant affection she usually throve on but sometimes bitterly resented, "you aren't able not to look at me the way you're looking at me now. I'd undoubtedly make straight for you, and the whole affair would come crashing into the open."

She realised the design in his compliment, yet it set her heart beating faster.

Phillip would never give her away in public. He was far too controlled—in truth, too calculating. There weren't to be any links between them till—afterwards.

But the thought that he might, just possibly, be so rash, so indifferent to consequences, left her exquisitely shaken and quieted her protests—as he had known it would.

But oh, how glorious if for love of her Phillip should forget

caution, ambition, James' money, everything but their need for each other!

A tear slid down her cheek, and anger at Phillip ebbed as it always ebbed. She knew her Phillip, knew what he was and loved what he was. What if he wanted James' money almost as much as he wanted her? She had the recollection of their passion to tell her that it was only *almost* as much.

And perhaps, she thought with sudden honesty, perhaps without James' money, she herself would find love and passion diminishing in urgency. She confronted that possibility for a moment, found it unbearable, and burrowed back in the warmth of Phillip's love. All she needed was to be patient, to ask no questions, and Phillip would take care of everything.

The letter came in the morning post, typed, in a cheap envelope. Mrs. Barret did not know what made her single it out from the rest of the letters, what caused her to go into her bedroom and shut the door before opening the envelope, for Ellen, her maid, was out and there was no one in the house except Raynder. She and Phillip had agreed never to write to each other, yet she knew this letter was from him.

It's because I'm so sensitive to him, she thought, and felt meltingly sensitive.

Unfortunately, my sweet, he wrote, without salutation, *you make yourself so charming to everyone from wealthy, elderly lawyers who marry you, to handsome menservants who dote on you—as that butler of yours clearly does—that I dare not risk phoning.*

That look of yours that brought us together is what keeps us apart. You are as transparent as you are ornamental, and I'd like to build a harem wall round you and make you my one-woman harem.

Mrs. Barret closed her eyes, holding this, her first love letter from Phillip. She wondered why spoken things are so different from the same things written down. If Phillip had *said* this to her, would it have seemed so—what was the word—self-satisfied? She glanced at the next paragraph.

Now, briefly, to business, he wrote. *All you are to do is write James a good smarmy letter, leaving nothing to the imagination. You are to be a loving, longing wife who wants only one thing, the return of her James. Since, as the world well knows, James is a doting, not to say uxorious—you'll have to look that up in a dictionary, my adorable dimwit—husband, this letter will prove to those who will be sharply concerned that you return his sentiments in kind. Posted today, your letter*

should reach his client's office in Liverpool tomorrow. Actually it is immaterial if it gets there in time for James to read it, as long as it's there for the police. Address it carefully, and incidentally, my sweet, you'd better keep to the usual routine and put it on the hall table for Raynder to take to post. He always takes the letters for post when he goes out after lunch, and it's important he should notice it.

That's all you have to do, sweet. Write it, address it, forget it. The less you know, the better.

Don't worry about me. I have myself completely covered and, in any case, there is no reason for me to be suspected. In a few months—it needn't be a long mourning period, as you're young and known to be most sweetly featherbrained—we'll meet again, and then all life begins for us. Need I tell you to destroy this? My life is literally in your hands.

Yours, for ever and ever.

There was no signature.

Calmly, softly, only faintly aware that the wave of anger was rising within her once again, Mrs. Barret put down the letter, went to the bookshelves to look up uxorious, and returned. She sat at her desk, without immediately beginning to write.

Uxorious, she thought. Excessively or dotingly fond of, or submissive to, a wife.

That was James. Doting, submissive, excessive. Also suspicious, possessive, jealous. Also fat and twice her age. He had no *right* to be that way. He had, she thought with uncluttered assurance, no right to *be*.

She wrote a long, an excessively long, doting, submissive letter to her husband in Liverpool; and as she wrote, her resentment mounted, though her hand remained steady and her blue eyes limpid. She looked like an angel or a very choice doll, filling pages with her quick, pretty script.

She thought how stunned and delighted James would be—if he should read it. But Phillip would see that James took no lasting pleasure from it or ever came home for proof of its avowals.

"Adorable dimwit," Phillip had called her. "Most sweetly featherbrained. . . The less you know, the better," he had said.

And did he think she always loved his arrogance, his high-handedness? Because she had a face like a doll, he assumed she had the mind of one, could be continually treated like one.

She stood, holding the carefully-addressed letter in a hand that shook with fury. She wondered why people never noticed her hands, which were such fearful betrayers of her emotions. Phillip thought that he could call the tune, and he might very

well be right. But when James was— when James was gone, who knew who would do the calling? Clever Phillip, or the dimwit he wished to keep in a one-woman harem?

The soft spring sunshine filtered across her desk. She took the letter, together with a note to her dressmaker and the acceptance of a dinner invitation, and put the three envelopes for post on the brass tray in the hall, stopping on her way back for a moment's chat with Raynder.

"You'll be sure to take the letters when you go out after luncheon, won't you, Raynder," she said. "There's a note there for Mr. Barret and I want it to catch the afternoon post."

She found happiness in the way Raynder grew happy in her presence. This sort of response in people was not a novelty; but it never lost its appeal, nor she her craving for it. She saw herself through the eyes of others—a lovable, lovely person.

She decided to invite some friends for cocktails. Someone, surely, would suggest dinner, and so tonight would be taken care of. And after tonight—and all the nights that were to follow before she and Phillip could be together?

She shivered and thought how strange it was that James would not be coming back. That Phillip might somehow fail in his intention did not occur to her. Phillip was very efficient. She was to be without James for ever.

She had a singular sensation of actual-bereavement and then an overwhelming desire for Phillip's presence. I want him, she thought, the ripples of anger draining away before the strength of her loneliness and need. "Phillip, Phillip, please," she moaned. "I need you."

After lunch, almost in desperation, she asked some people to come in for-cocktails. Now she felt safe, with only a few hours to fill before they came. She went up to her room and relaxed until tea-time.

Then she remembered Phillip's letter and that she was to destroy it. She rose leisurely from the chaise-longue, crossed to the desk, and stood staring with confusion but no real concern.

The letter was not on her desk, where she certainly remembered having left it. Still, it must be somewhere. She began a search that grew, by the second, less confident. Long after she knew it was hopeless, she went on looking, too terrified to admit what must have happened.

Her hands icy cold, she finally crouched against a corner of the bed and tried to understand what the consequences of this must be. Because there could be no question. In her unseeing anger, she had stuffed Phillip's letter into the envelope with those pages and pages of smarm to James.

No way to get in touch with Phillip. He was as far from her as if he'd left the earth. No way, she knew, to get the letter back from the post office. Oh, but that's cruel, she thought. How can they keep my own letter from me?

The letter had been posted two hours ago, by now it had left the pillar box and was on its way.

Think—just think! Think carefully and a solution would offer itself, simply because it *had* to. She could drive to meet James. She could, she thought bitterly, if she'd shown enough interest in his itinerary to know where he was going to be.

The letter had been addressed to a client's office in Liverpool. When would James be in that office? She didn't know. She knew there was as little chance of her walking into a strange office and abstracting or being given a letter addressed to James as there was of getting it back from the post office.

They might be polite. They might even believe she was Mrs. Barret. But they would not hand over a letter to her without James' authority.

Oh, she thought, what have I done? *What have I done?* Oh, get me out of this—just let me be *out* of this, and I'll never do anything wrong again. Her fists were clenched painfully against her breast as she wept, wanting, above everything in life, to know and be secure in James' jealous protectiveness once again.

Ellen, her maid, arriving with the teatray found her in a dead faint on the floor. Because Ellen was very fond of pretty little scatterbrained Mrs. Barret, she did all she could to help.

Mrs. Barret wouldn't let her call a doctor but she did let herself be put to bed.

Ellen called off the impromptu cocktail party and saw that Mrs. Barret took two sleeping pills, and she spent the night in the guest room in case Mrs. Barret needed her. She did all she could, and in the morning she talked so much that Mrs. Barret was driven—almost witless with fear—to get up, and put on her sapphire mink coat to go out.

In the hall, Raynder went to open the front door for her. " Why, madam," he said, looking at her with quick sympathy, " I was sorry to hear you were not well."

" It was nothing," she said, her gentle voice coming, it seemed, through layers of pain and terror, " nothing at all. A touch of migraine."

" Maybe you shouldn't go out."

" I'm all right."

She turned away.

" Oh, madam," he said, " I'm sorry, but that letter you sent

to Mr. Barret—I found there were no stamps on it, so I brought it back."

Mrs. Barret licked her dry lips and swayed a little. She wondered if ever before in her whole life she'd known what happiness was. She put out a shaking hand and said evenly, "How stupid of me! Give it to me, Raynder, and I'll see—I'll see to the postage."

Raynder, who had had an opportunity to do a favour for pretty Mrs. Barret just for the price of a few stamps, told her it had all been taken care of.

"It was a bulky envelope, madam, more than the ounce, I thought, so I took the liberty of adding extra postage just to be on the safe side and I went straight out again to the pillar box." He looked at her happily, waiting to be thanked.

Mrs. Barret never disappointed her little public. She gave him a smile of exceeding sweetness, a smile that remained fixed on her face until Raynder grew nervous and finally frightened.

Mrs. Barret didn't notice. She was wondering what Phillip would say when he realised how far her baby-blue expression had taken them.

© Mary Stolz 1960

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LIVE WIRE

In these days when sensations are two a penny the appearance of a telegram can still stir the emotions . . .

It is easy enough to expect the worst of its contents, a tendency which nearly led to disaster recently in the case of Miss Van Oort, a Dutch girl, whose hand was sought by a young man in Australia.

A proposal of marriage arrived by cable from Sydney at Enschede and received Miss Van Oort's approval. "Ja," she cabled back, and to this the happy clerk in Sydney, not to be outdone by his fiancée's brevity, returned the blissful reply, "Whacko!"

Whatever the Dutch for "Whacko!" may be, Miss Van Oort, and a good many of her friends besides, did not know it, and she interpreted the strange-sounding disyllable as indicating that it was all off.

Officialdom, however, which can rise to heights of gallantry when romance is in peril, came to the rescue . . .

Fortunately cables are not a popular means of proposing marriage; if they were, some standard greeting, some universal "Whacko!" would have to be invented for such occasions.

from The Times, January 11, 1956

CHRISTOPHER LANDON

THE MIRROR ROOM

The last Christopher Landon novel you read in Argosy was the best-selling "Ice Cold in Alex"—remember the desert epic of three men and a girl, and Katy the ambulance?

Landon, who always writes from first-hand experience—"Alex" was the fruit of his war service in North Africa—took a special trip to Berlin, second class, with his hat pulled furtively down over his eyes and coat collar turned up, in order to acquire the background for this new adventure story.

Recently removed from Sussex to London, he's living a migrant existence now between Hampstead and Spain, where he has a piece of land on the Costa Brava covered in olives and boulders. His next novel, "Dead Men Rise Up Never," is set there. Other work in process: two TV plays, and plans for a thriller dealing with the M.I.5 of the Inland Revenue, which will be affectionately dedicated to Mr. Bloodsucker.

THAT MORNING, a clutch of us were gathered at the bedside of a patient with a bluish tinge to his lips.

The Chief's gaze turned on me with no benevolence, his eyes probing mine with that famous sarcastic stare. His very arrogance was a challenge and, though I was feeling anything but lighthearted, I decided it was one of my clowning mornings.

"Well, Mr. Armitage," the Chief said, "what do you perceive?"

At that instant, I could only perceive Hutchins giving me a ghost of a wink over the Chief's shoulder.

"Well, sir, he looks—he looks—a bit blue," I said.

"You mean in the dumps?"

"No, sir, I meant cyanosed," I answered smoothly.

"Um, really very good," said the Chief. "You've been reading your medical dictionary. Anything else?"

"Pulsation in the neck?"

"Yes. Rather clever. Well, you can be the first of this group of geniuses to take us a stage further. Feel for the thrill."

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"The thrill, man, the thrill! Feel for the thrill!"

I placed my hand over the patient's heart and felt the characteristic palpitation of mitral stenosis. "Yes, sir, I feel it," I said.

"Now listen; listen, man!" said the Chief.

I winked at my friend Hutchins, adjusted my stethoscope and placed the chestpiece in the region of the patient's heart. Silence.

I became aware that the Chief was speaking. "I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Thrrupdub, thrrupdub, thrrupdub," said the Chief.

"I'm sorry, sir," I said. "I could have sworn you said, 'Thrrupdub.'"

"Thrrupdub, thrrupdub, thrrupdub! That's what I did say, you idiot," the Chief exploded. "Thrrupdub—that's what his

heart-beat should sound like if he's a case of mitral stenosis. If he's not, it should just sound like 'lupdub.'"

"Oh I see, sir." I applied my stethoscope once again.

Silence.

"Well?" said the Chief.

I straightened. "I'm sorry, sir, but I can't hear a thing."

"I am waiting, Mr. Armitage; patiently waiting," growled the Chief.

"It's just that I can't hear his heart, sir."

"Here," said the Chief in a fury, and applied himself to the stethoscope. There was a long silent pause. The Chief looked at the stethoscope in bewilderment, shook it, applied it again to the patient. Another long silent pause.

The Chief straightened, and slowly began to unscrew the chest-piece of the stethoscope. "Wait for it," murmured Hutchins.

With ponderous deliberation, the Chief extracted the long twist of cottonwool that had effectively silenced the instrument. With disdainful thumb and forefinger he waved the cottonwool before my nose. "Disappear, man!" he snarled. "Go away and form yourself into a queue."

He swept on, the group of students swirling round him, and I made my way into the testing-room off the ward, which was the nearest and quietest place for a smoke.

As I lit up and exhaled over the specimen bottles, the door opened and Hutchins slid into the room. "The old boy's in such a fury with you," he chortled, "he'll never notice he's a couple of idiots short. I say, you were in good form this morning. Can't think why!"

I paced up and down the room. "Well, if you must know, I can't afford enough beer to drown my sorrows, so I'm laughing them off. Doctor Pagliacci, that's me."

"If it's money, old man," said Hutchins, "I'm no use for more than a couple of quid. But if it's women, Dr. Hutchins has just the prescription. What about an evening with that blonde nurse in Ward D?"

"Sorry, not for me."

"No interest in women? I say, Hugh, that's bad," Hutchins said in a bedside voice.

"Not in women," I agreed. "Just in one woman. The wrong woman. And—oh, hell, the joke's wearing a bit thin. Yes, there *is* something on my mind."

Hutchins would be a good doctor one day, and he was a good friend. He perched on the edge of a bench, swinging his legs, and said, "Come on, Hugh. Get it off your chest. What's it all about?"

And so I told him; rather haltingly at first, because when I began to put it into words it sounded so vague and pointless. It was about my brother Paul Armitage.

Paul and I are identical twins. I think that with us, more than with most of these semi-rarities, the full force of our oneness was

brought home from our first thinking days because our father was a doctor. He, dear, loved man, when not driven to distraction by the things we did, by the subterfuges we pulled off by reason of our identical height and build, features, voices, and colouring, carried out various tests that amused him.

As soon as we were old enough to understand, we knew that we were uniovular, sprung from the cleavage of one egg. We understood the division of the same blood groups and the almost identical matching of our fingerprints. But even Father always insisted that we wore our respective school ties when he was around. He could not always tell which was which.

Mother could always tell us apart. There must have been something in the fact that she had borne us that never let her make a mistake. A deep physical thing.

And it was there between the two of us. A sort of invisible bond that became even stronger when our different temperaments made it inevitable that we should drift apart. I remember once, when Paul broke his ankle at rugger, and I was at my school a hundred miles away . . . I knew . . . I just *knew*, at the very moment it happened, that there was something wrong with him.

It was just as difficult to explain as I had feared—which is why I had never tried to talk about it to Hutchins before.

"D'you mean to say," he asked when I'd finished, "that you even think alike?"

"No, there you have the difference," I answered. "But even that is a bit hard to explain. For though we think differently the link is there, because we understand how each other thinks in a quite fantastic way. Paul and I have quite different temperaments—which is probably why he's swanning around in some nicely well-paid and frightfully secret job in rocketry while I'm still a poor 'umble student, though I did spend a couple of years going round the world on a legacy an aunt left me."

I paused and lit another cigarette.

"You see," I said, "there's a sort of bond, even when we're not together— Oh, heck, let's change the subject. Sorry, Hutch. I know it sounds a lot of nonsense."

"No, it doesn't, actually," said Hutchins. "I've read that there's an almost telepathic link between uniovular twins. Is that what you're trying to say in that incoherent manner which so endears you to the lecturers?"

I grinned.

"That's it. I know when Paul's happy. I know when he's down. And I certainly know when he's in trouble."

"And now you know that brother Paul is about to seduce your best girl, so you settle into a nice deep depression and take it out by clowning with the Chief. Is that it?"

"Not exactly."

This was the part I could not explain. The restlessness over these last few months since Paul had told me that some secret and important phase of his rocket research work meant that we would

be unable to meet for a while. The knowledge that he was lying; and the inability to question him to shake his lie. And, too, the knowledge that he was in trouble—desperate trouble that was present in my own mind like some telepathic cloud.

This was something I could not possibly explain to Hutchins.

"But what about the girl?" he was asking.

"Well," I said, "it's on the old one-two."

"I bet it is," said Hutchins with a leer.

"Not what you think," I explained. "The one-two is a family code-word between Paul and me. It means that I go as Paul. We've done it often, taking out each other's girlfriends . . . without telling them."

Hutchins leaned back on the bench and roared with laughter. "That's marvellous! There must have been many interesting situations—"

"Yes. Some rather embarrassing. You see, Paul has loads of girlfriends, being a lot more smooth and certainly more solvent than I am. And sometimes my dear brother gets his dates a bit mixed. So that's when I'm called in. The old one-two. I pretend to be Paul for an evening and take some unsuspecting girl to a theatre or something at his expense while he's busy entertaining another girl—probably in quite a different way!"

"You mean you actually take his girls out?"

"Yes, now and again. And it's fun. At least, it was up to the last time—about three months ago."

"What was the trouble? Did she bring her mother along?"

"No. No trouble. It's just . . . oh, let's forget it. Thanks for giving my woes an airing, Hutch."

Hutchins executed a little war dance. "Ho ho," he chortled. "Now everything is explained. Hugh Armitage has fallen in love. At last. The old hormones have done their deadly work. Happy Hugh's been bitten!"

"Come off it, Hutch. I—"

"And she was under the old one-two plan?"

"Yes. I was standing in for Paul at a party in Chelsea—and she thought I was Paul. And—"

"What's her name?"

"Lydia. Lydia something. I don't know her address or where she works, and the only way I could get in touch with her would be by asking Paul, and I can't do that. Anyway, Lydia's *his* girl. And I don't know if I'm in love with her or not—but I can't stop thinking about her, and—"

There was a knock on the door and the old grizzled porter put his head inside. "I've been looking for you everywhere, Mr. Armitage. You're wanted on the phone. It's your brother. Says it's urgent."

As I ran down the corridors the cloud of foreboding and frustration that had been growing in my mind seemed to thicken and become almost tangible. Paul's voice, when I heard it on the

telephone, was casual; but I was more strongly aware than ever of a hidden meaning behind his words—a meaning that he did not wish to share.

" Hugh, I'm in a hell of a jam. There's a conference called for this evening. And I've got a date. Will you stand in for me—on the old one-two? "

I controlled a sudden surge of hope and excitement. My voice was as casual as my brother's. " Who is it this time? "

" Lydia," Paul said. " D'you remember her? You took her to that Chelsea party for me. I haven't seen her for ages."

" Just name the time and the place," I said, " I'll be delighted to hold the lady's hand."

" Don't get too delighted," said Paul. " Remember she'll think you're me. And, Hugh—I'm not joking—she must not know there are two of us. Just meet her in the Three Magpies—you know, the pub off Marylebone High Street—at eight o'clock, and I want you to collect a package she'll have for me."

Again that note of urgency underlying his voice. But I was too excited at the thought of seeing Lydia to fret over-much about Paul.

" I'll be there," I said. " Shall I bring the packet round to your flat afterwards? "

" For God's sake, no! " he exclaimed. " Sorry, Hugh old boy. But this job I'm on . . . Top secret stuff, you know. And for the moment the orders are: Don't be seen around, and soft-pedal the social ties."

I let him talk on, but I was not really listening. I was thinking still of Lydia when he rang off. I walked slowly back down the corridors.

I don't know if there is such a thing as love at first sight, but I do know there's a sort of instant awareness, of terrifying acuteness. A heightening of the senses. A promise of unspoken communication. An anticipation. This I had known that first night I met Lydia; even though she was not aware of my existence, since I was standing in for Paul. It had been agony to pretend to be another man when, for the first time in my life, I myself was filled with that strange yearning to possess her and to be possessed by her, wholly and completely, and as an undivided self.

I got through the day in a fever of excitement, but when I started walking up Marylebone High Street in the rain, I felt new fear.

Supposing I didn't recognise her? I had been thinking about her all day. She had been in my mind for months, in fact—and now I realised that I could not recall one of her features. She was an *impression* in my mind, a hope and an excitement.

Her hair was dark, and she came up to my shoulder. Her frail loveliness was instantly appealing; there was an indomitable courage in the set of her thin shoulders and her huge eyes. But whatever cōlour were her eyes?

She might be quite different from all I remembered . . .

But she wasn't. Those huge eyes were, in fact, violet, and

the first thing I noticed when I pushed open the door and stepped into the Three Magpies.

I had been there once before with Paul, and rather liked the sprawl of the old pub, crushed between blocks of office buildings. The private bar, which I knew was Paul's haunt, was all it proclaimed. Jammed between the pintables, strip lighting, and jukebox of the saloon, the spit and sawdust of the public, it really was private. Subdued lighting, a lot of brass, and hardly a soul there.

Now there was only one customer, the girl sitting on a high stool at one end of the counter, staring down into her red aperitif. She turned her head as I came in and closed the door. "You're late," she said. But that and the half look she gave me were enough to tell me she hadn't changed.

She moved across to a settle. I ordered another gin and Dubonnet for her, a large whisky and soda for myself, and then took off my overcoat and slid on to the seat beside her.

While the landlord was serving us I sat silent, watching her profile, waiting for an opening. Yes, she was as beautiful as I remembered, with the same soft voice I had never been able to forget. She fulfilled all my impressions, all my excitement. I knew instantly that this was the Lydia of my dreams.

But there was something else. Perhaps I had not noticed it before, that other time. In the clear English, there was just the faintest trace of a foreign accent.

I pecked a kiss at her forehead and said, "Darling, I know I'm late, and I'm wet, and I'm thirsty, but if you'll give me three minutes to tell you how lovely you look, I hope you'll forgive me."

She shook an unruly lock of dark hair back from her face and looked at me with some surprise. "This *is* a memorable evening," she said quietly. "Do you know, Paul, that is the first time you have kissed me for three months, and the first time you have *ever* apologised."

I was not to be curbed. "Lydia, my love," I said, "you see before you a new Paul—I must have been out of my mind to let even three days go by without kissing you."

There was a twist to her eyebrows, and I could see she was trying to suppress a smile which refused suppression. "Paul, please," she said—and there was a sort of sadness to the smile—"don't try to start up something that's dead. And don't be flippant. Things are too serious for that." She laid a hand on mine for an instant and then, almost as if sorry for the gesture, tried to withdraw it.

I held the hand, turned it over, and lightly kissed the palm.

The smile faded from her face, and I knew that she had slipped back into the mood from which I had jolted her when I arrived. She said absently, "What on earth have you been doing today? You stink of ether."

Danger-point. "Oh, a new experiment we're on."

"On what?"

"Sorry—it's secret."

She laughed a sudden, humourless laugh.

" Secret! Of course, it's secret. Do you expect that to surprise me? As a matter of fact, Paul, I'm afraid I have a surprise—an unpleasant surprise for you. I'm sorry, Paul, but I haven't the envelope for you this week. Bertil has it—and he wants to deliver it to you in person."

She stopped for a moment as the landlord came through to see if we had everything we wanted. In those few seconds I could only think of one thing she had said. " This week."

So they had been meeting regularly, though Paul had said they hadn't for ages. And who was Bertil? Paul had not briefed me for a meeting with a completely-unknown man . . .

The landlord went back to the public bar, and she gripped my arm with a sort of intensity, the same tone as Paul had used coming into her voice. " Can't you see what this can mean for both of us? "

And though I hadn't a clue as to what she was talking about, I knew she was in trouble, just as much as Paul.

" There'll be no more paypackets for you, Paul. Only exposure, when it suits. And you know what they would do to me. You realise—you must realise—what would happen to my father and mother."

I didn't know. But I was aware that she seemed terribly afraid. The tension of her presence beside me made me realise that for her sake as well as for Paul's I had to go on with this—for I knew now that I loved her.

" Well, let's find a taxi—shall we? "

Lydia drained her drink in one gulp. " You seem very calm about it. You haven't met Bertil yet but, when you do, you'll soon find that he doesn't like to be kept waiting." She leaned forward, gripped my arm, and said again, " Can't you see what this means? "

We went out into the rain. It was pelting now, slanting like steel rods that bounced and shattered on the pavement as we stood in the shelter of the doorway, waiting for a cab. One crawled by, for hire, and I grabbed it. Lydia gave an address softly, so softly that I did not hear. We swung round in a full circle and started heading towards the south-west.

She did not speak. She sat away from me, huddled in a corner, the pearls of rain spangling the dark background of her hair. I slid my arm round her shoulders, but she looked up at me and said, " Please, Paul—don't. For a moment when you came in tonight, so unlike your usual self, I was almost ready to believe that things could be different between us, but—"

" Can't they? " I urged. " Can't we both forget the past, my darling, and start again? From tonight—from this moment? "

She smiled wistfully. " Oh, Paul, if only I could believe you. If only . . ." Then she shrugged and her voice hardened. " I'm a fool to talk like this. And you're a fool even to think these things —when you'll be facing Bertil in a few minutes. He's angry. Very angry. Please, please, Paul, take what's coming. Control yourself. You've got to. For both of us."

The windows of the cab were greasy, smeared with the downpour; I only know that we started a labyrinthine journey through the sidestreets of Earls Court.

At last the taxi stopped in a dull, dingy square; the houses that once had so much dignity grown sad, mouldering, with the stucco of their porches flaking beneath the sad requiem of the rain, the rustle of wet leaves.

No clue to the address; no number on the door. Lydia merely turned to the taxi-driver and said, "Wait."

We went up into the porch side by side and she rang. The door opened almost at once; as if someone had been standing behind it, waiting for the sound of the bell.

The man who opened it was very tall, with a lantern jaw and close-cropped hair. That was all I could see of him—no detail because the one dim lamp on the hall table was behind him. He did not speak, but motioned to a door at the far end of a passage, and we walked towards it, Lydia and I, side by side. I could hear the soft pad of his feet on the carpet coming after us.

Lydia knocked, and a voice said, "Come in."

It was a small room, a sort of library. There was a big desk, and on it one of those flexible lamps with a powerful bulb in it that was slanted straight towards our eyes. Everything else was in shadow, including the man who was sitting behind the desk.

Only one thing came out into that pool of light—his hands. I could see them clearly: small, smooth, white, but giving the impression of latent power.

The face? Nothing against that light but the awareness of something pale and oval, like an egg.

I heard the door shut behind us, and a soft sound that told me that the butler—or whatever he was—was leaning back against it. We stood like a couple of kids, trying to peer through that barrier of light, waiting to come to grips with what was behind it.

When the voice came it was a surprise: soft, modulated, and speaking perfect—too perfect—English. "So you have brought your protégé to see me at last, Lydia?"

"Yes." There was no expression in her voice.

"And will he be good?"

"I hope so."

"So do I. For your sake as well as his own."

Seconds of dead silence. I could hear Lydia's breathing.

Then the voice went on again, this time addressing me. A sort of thick silkiness had come into it.

"How do you do, Mr. Armitage. 'It is a pity that our first meeting could not have been in happier circumstances. But for that you are to blame, Mr. Armitage, and I'm very annoyed with you. The information you provide for us, and for which you are so well paid, can hardly be called satisfactory. My experts have evaluated your last set of figures. They do not make sense. That, Mr. Armitage, is not good enough." The stilted voice ceased.

I was not liking any of this, and I could sense the terror that

emanated from Lydia, but still I did not speak. Apparently I was not expected to. One of those white hands went down out of sight, coming back with a packet of cigarettes and a box of matches. Both worked together then, getting out a fag and lighting it. A cloud of smoke drifted towards us from behind the glare, and then one hand disappeared again, this time to come back with a stiff white envelope that slid towards me over the wide top of the desk.

His voice was like poured cream. "Your honorarium for this middle period, Mr. Armitage. Not with thanks for past services, but with the proviso that results must be better in future. With it you will find the name of a compound that you, or some of your more senior colleagues, may find familiar. I want exact details—*full* details, *correct* details—within a week. Otherwise, Mr. Armitage, there will be no more pay . . . and no more opportunity to spend it."

I scarcely heard the last part. I watched, like a bird fascinated by a snake, those fingers playing with the spent match he had used. They took it while he was talking, broke it half across in five places while he uttered those last short sentences. Then it was curved, making a complete circle. I had never seen anyone do that to a match before; and I'd never forget it.

There was another silence.

"Well, take your money," he was saying, "and get out! You had better use those irresistible charms to keep him up to scratch, Lydia. Or you know what will happen to *your* interests. And if your charms are not enough, dear Lydia, perhaps you would remind Mr. Paul Clever Armitage that I serve powerful and ruthless masters. Now get out!"

For hours that night, after leaving Lydia, I paced my room, chain-smoking, wrestling with the inevitable suspicion.

My mind seemed to be stunned. The magnitude of this thing was too great to be comprehended at first. My brother, a part of my very self, had been receiving money from Bertil and giving in exchange information that was so secret that he did not even allow me into his flat.

Paul, a traitor? A spy? My mind would not let me say the words. Paul, so close to me and yet so different. Paul, wildly extravagant, to whom everything had always come so easily: success, women, money. Money! He always spent a lot and needed more. But what flaw in his character had led him to this?

I remembered the tears in Lydia's eyes as we left Bertil; how, in the taxi, she had given a deep shuddering sigh and collapsed against me, racked by sobs. I had stroked her dark, perfumed hair. The sight in the passing lights of that pale, tear-stained face broke down the last barrier. I kissed her.

Her lips were soft; not responsive, not resisting. She lay there quite passive and silent. Only when I had straightened to stare ahead she murmured, "Oh, Paul, what a ghastly mess we've got ourselves into!"

I had no answer to that, and could only say, " Where are we going now? "

" I told him to drop me off at Marble Arch."

" Let me take you right home." At least that would have given me some chance of seeing her again.

" No, not tonight. I don't think I can stand any more. I just want to be alone."

We were in the Park, and soon she would be leaving. I wanted desperately to tell her the truth; who I was, that I wanted to see her again. But I couldn't, because of Paul.

As the cab started to slow down, she had said suddenly, in that quiet, matter-of-fact voice, " Do you know, you've never kissed me like that before? "

" How do you mean? "

" It was different—gentle."

At Marble Arch she leaned forward and tapped on the glass. The cab pulled up. She sat for a moment searching my face, and then took my hands in both of hers and kissed me. " Please, Paul—" she had whispered, " be gentle. To me; whatever you feel about other things. Think of my side of it. You know what that means! " And then she had turned quickly and gone out of the cab and off across the road through the traffic . . .

All through the long night I had been trying to work out a line of action, and now it was morning and I knew what I must do.

I cut the ward round and went instead to see old Perry, my anatomy tutor. Someone had once told me that Perry had a cousin in Military Intelligence; and I felt I could talk to my tutor even though I could not yet face going to the police.

Perry heard me patiently. When I had finished he said, " You were right to come to me, I think. I shall now forget everything you have said, but you must go to see my cousin."

I held up the unopened white envelope that had lain like lead in my pocket since Bertil had given it to me the night before. " Shall I open this? "

" No. Let my cousin do so, if he thinks fit." Perry scribbled an address on a scrap of paper and told me, " Go now. Just ask for the Colonel."

" Colonel who? "

" Just the Colonel," he said.

The Colonel was a quiet, thin man of indeterminate age, with sandy hair and cold blue eyes. He was sitting on a kitchen chair at a desk that was just as shabby as the rest of that small room on the top floor of a house in Kensington. He heard me through in complete silence and then asked me to repeat it all over again.

My words were stumbling a little by the time I had finished, and all the Colonel said was, " I think you had better give me that envelope now, Mr. Armitage." I passed it across.

Without raising his eyes, the Colonel spoke to the young man who had let me in—a tweedy type with the battered look of a rugger

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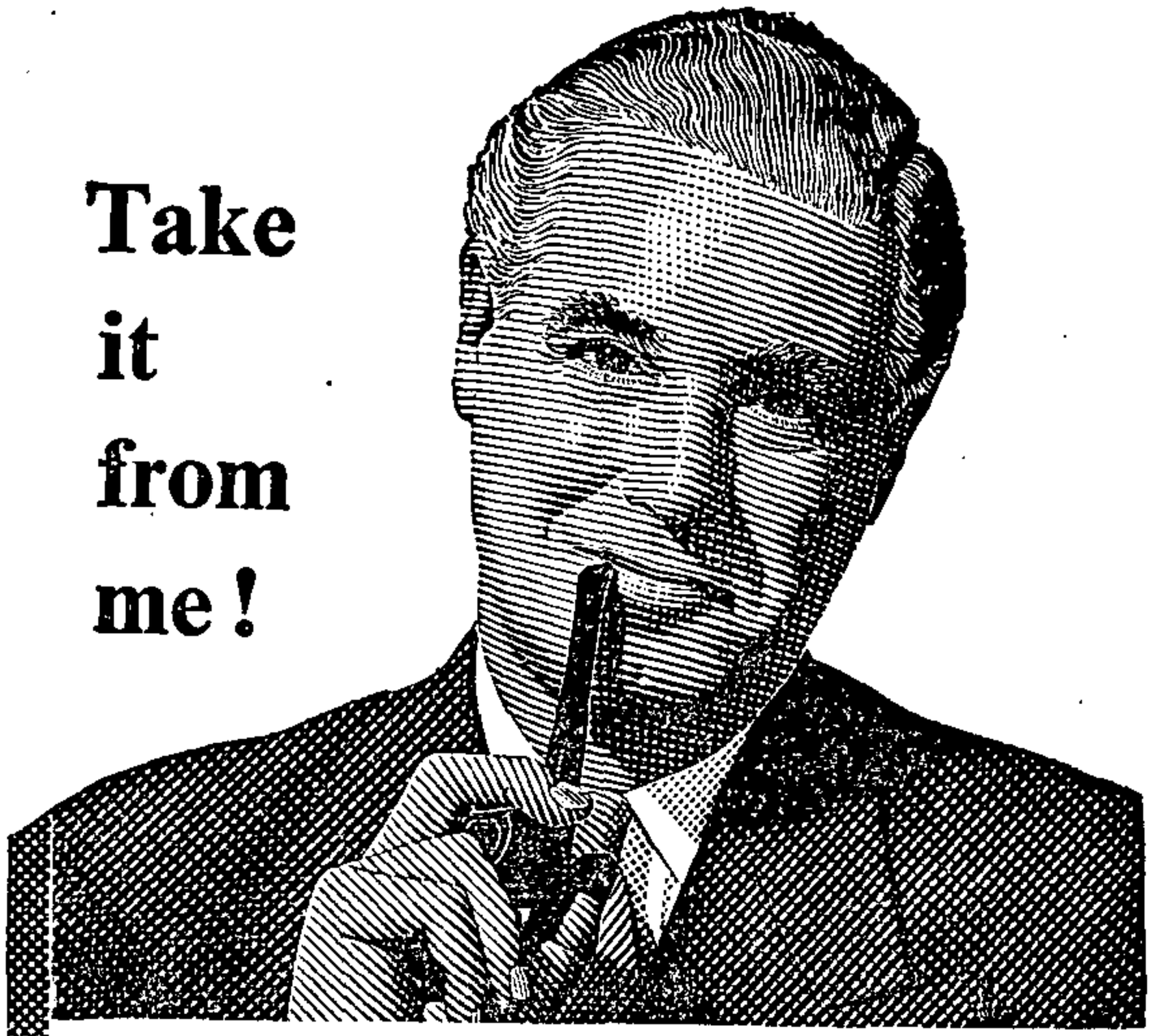

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player, who was now lounging against the wall behind me. "Twenty fivers here, Benson. Not now, but check the serial numbers, just in case. And this—"

The Colonel smoothed a piece of paper from the envelope and addressed me. "Tell me, Mr. Armitage, what do you know about Hidyn?"

"Nothing. It sounds like a hair-dye."

"If I told you it was a boron-fluoride compound, what would you say then?"

I stared at the only decoration on the bare walls—a bookmaker's out-of-date calendar. "I'm a medical student, you know, not a chemist. But at a guess it might be a dry-cleaning preparation."

"You would be quite wrong." He paused, and I knew with certainty and loathing what was coming. "You see, we established while you were on your way here that your brother *is* a chemist and that he works as assistant to one of this country's most eminent scientists at the rocket research establishment at Brydge. So—if I tell you that Hidyn is a top-secret rocket propellant, of which you admit that Bertil demanded full details, the implication becomes fairly clear?"

It was. It was bitterly clear. But still I could not put it into words.

I got up and walked to the window, stared out at the whispering plane trees of the dusty square, watched the trim paths of the central garden, the nanny with the pram slowly circling the outside orbit like a beetle in a bottle. She was caught; so was I.

There was a scrape of a chair behind me, and then a hand was laid gently on my shoulder. "Mr. Armitage. It's never easy to have to tell someone that his brother is a traitor."

I swung round at that. "You don't begin to understand! Not just my brother—something nearer and dearer than that: my twin. I told you. We're twins, *identical*. It's like discovering some dreadful weakness in yourself! And I know Paul: I almost *am* Paul. There's goodness in him, too. There must be something I can do."

"There is," said the Colonel. "Calm down, and sit down, and help us."

I gave him Paul's telephone number. He dialled and there was no reply. Then he turned to the battered rugger player. "Here's the address, Benson. Get down there. Quick. Find out what you can. Nothing official, though."

"What about those fivers, sir?"

"Give them to me. They're not so important. You get cracking." The Colonel dialled my home number, and again he got no reply. Then he rang the rocket establishment at Brydge. There was a discreet conversation. At the end of it he put the phone down slowly, and said, "I'm afraid your brother appears to have taken a holiday."

I remember sitting for a long time after that, answering question after question.

Eventually, the telephone rang. "Benson? . . . You *have*? . . ." The Colonel looked at his watch. "No, wait for us—outside on the corner. We'll be there right away."

I did not say much as the Colonel drove fast down the Great West Road. My directions were not a lot of use, and I had to explain to him that Paul had asked me to keep away from the new flat. At last we turned a corner, and there was the big block of flats. The burly figure of Benson detached itself from a newsagent's counter and he was in the back seat of the car almost before we had stopped.

"No joy," he said. "Armitage hasn't been there at all today. I got the porter to take me up to the flat. Milk bottles still outside. That worried the porter a bit, because he said Mrs. Armitage always took them in and he didn't know she was away too—"

"*Mrs.* Armitage! What the hell are you talking about?"

Benson ignored me. "We'll get in all right on the lost key gag," he was saying.

"But there's no Mrs. Armitage. My brother isn't married."

"Armitage—" the Colonel's voice had an edge to it— "let us concentrate on getting into the flat. You say you are the mirror of your brother. If that is so, the porter will think you *are* your brother. Tell him you left your key behind when you went out in a hurry, and get him to let you in with his duplicate.

"If the porter asks you about Mrs. Armitage, just stall. Say she was called away to a sick relative."

Of course, it worked. The porter greeted me as my brother and I had no need to lie. Cleverer people than the porter had been unable to tell Paul from me.

The porter was a little gnome of a man with bird-bright eyes behind thick glasses, and a bald freckled head. Only when he was opening the lift gates at the third floor did he make any conversation, and what he said was the thing I dreaded.

"You might have told me, sir, that Mrs. Armitage was going away. It gave me quite a turn to see those milk bottles outside when this gentleman here came to call on you and we couldn't get a reply."

There was the faintest tinge of reproach in his voice.

He stopped before a door numbered 32, and went through his own bunch to find the right key.

"Well, there you are, sir." The door swung open. "And don't forget it another time."

"Thanks; I won't." I stepped forward into the little hall, with the Colonel so close, so tense, just behind me. There was a faint clink as Benson, the third of our trio, picked up the milk bottles from outside the door and brought them in; a click of finality as he closed the door with a shove from his back.

It was dark as well as small, that hall. A door opened off each of the three sides that faced us, and the only light came from one which was ajar.

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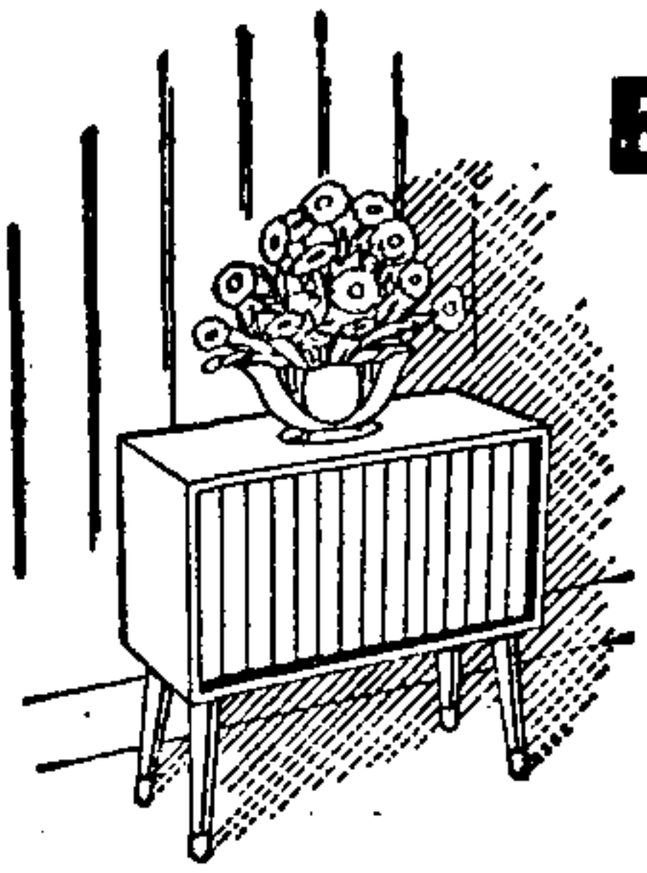

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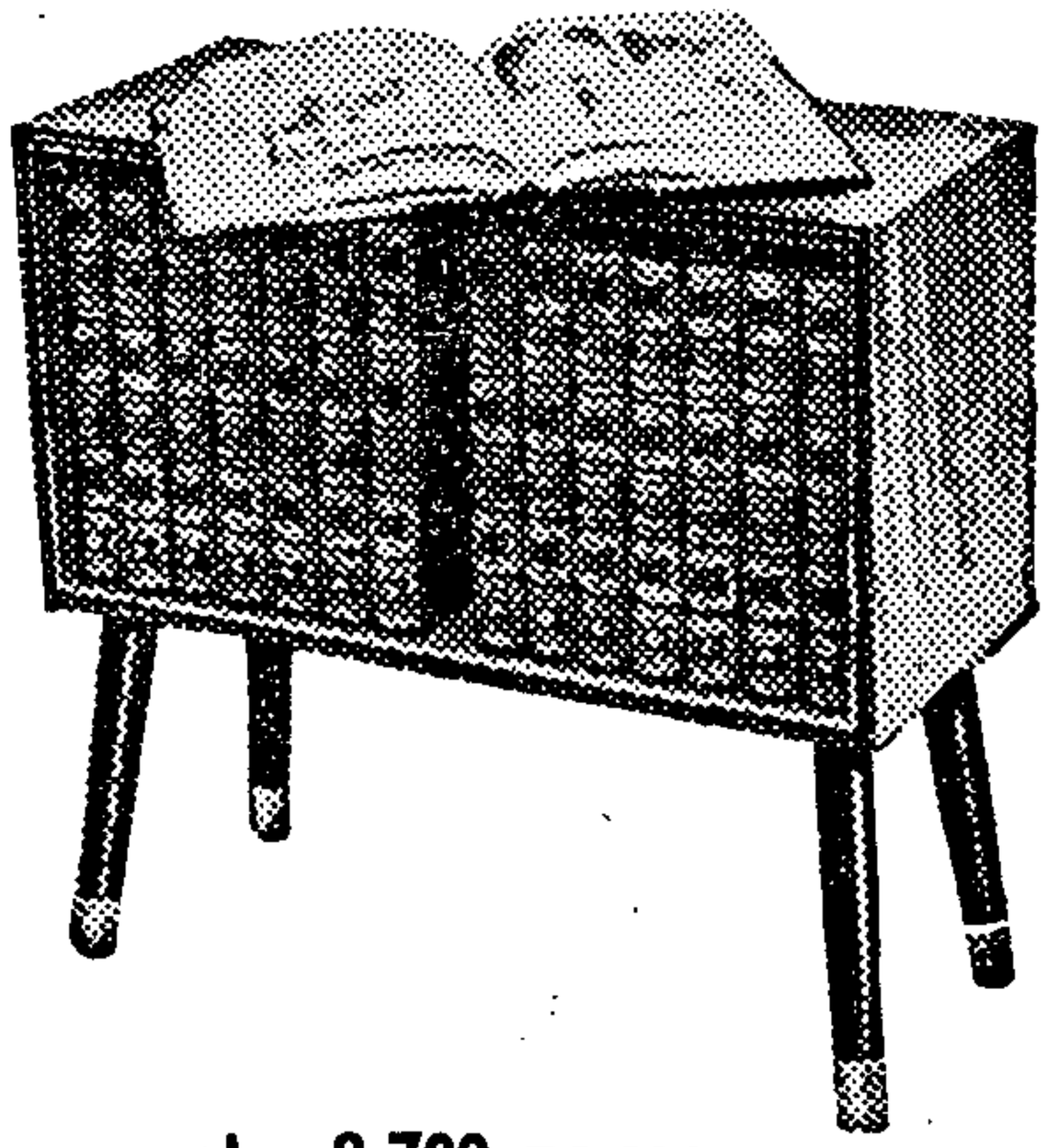

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"Where's the light switch?" said the Colonel to no one in particular.

I bent automatically and picked up two letters from the mat. The Colonel held out his hand. "Do you mind?"

"I don't know that you have any right—"

"I am the *only* one who has any rights at the moment, Mr. Armitage. Please—" He stopped and looked at the contents of each; then gave me a queer, penetrating look. "These bills. Here's a tailor—£72. *Dear Sir, Unless* . . . And a wine stores for £45. The same. Your brother has no private income?"

"None. Our father left very little when he died."

The Colonel glanced again at the bills, meaningfully, and handed them to Benson to pocket. The same ironic glance swept over the furnishings of the flat—furnishings blatantly beyond the means of a man in my brother's job. But it was not that which worried me so much as the tidiness of the place. This was no bachelor flat. The hand of a woman was all over it; and the words came screaming back at me: *Mrs. Armitage.*

Who was she? Wife—or mistress? And why had Paul kept her existence a secret, even from me? Was this why he had asked me not to call at the flat—or was the reason something to do with Bertil?

I stood rather foolishly, turning this over in my mind, while the Colonel and his man moved around with a cold-blooded efficiency, poking and prodding and pocketing. They used their handkerchiefs *to hold anything they had to touch.*

At last the Colonel said, "Check that cocktail cabinet. I'll see what else is around." He went out of the door in the same cautious way he had come in.

I sat down in a chair, suddenly tired, weary of it all. I didn't hear the Colonel come back, but his voice sounded behind me. "Would you like to meet Mrs. Armitage?" he said.

I whipped round in my chair. "If she exists, and if she can prove that she is Mrs. Armitage. Where is she?"

His voice was very gentle. "*She can't come to you. You must* go to her." He made a motion of his hand to guide me through the doorway.

I followed him into the hall, and there, as before, the other two doors were shut. I said, "Where is she?" and he looked at me with that same penetrating glance.

"Don't you know?"

"No."

"Well, I'll show you. In here." He swung open the left-hand door. It was the bedroom. My eyes took in the dressing-table with its perfumes and powders and mirrors undeniably proclaiming the occupation of a woman.

The Colonel said, "Do you still want to meet Mrs. Armitage?"

"But of course."

He pushed open the sliding doors of the clothes-cupboard. There were frocks, hanging in rows, with an air of permanence

about them. He swept them aside, and at the bottom, on the shoes, was a long pink and black bundle. Not a very attractive bundle now, though it might once have been.

It was the body of a young girl in one of those semi-transparent nylon nighties. She must have been pretty once, but not now—the purple face, the tongue protruding between the clenched teeth, the stocking that had strangled her still tied tight round her neck.

There was no horror for me—a fourth-year man is used to the sight of violent death—but pity, a deep pity, and a great wave of relief that this dead, unknown girl was not Lydia.

We walked into the other room and the Colonel poured me a Scotch from one of Paul's many bottles. I downed it, and he took the glass from me, holding it in a handkerchief. "You don't mind? Fingerprints. And now I have to call in the police—even if only in a limited way."

I prowled restlessly about the room as he dialled the phone and asked for the Commissioner. His voice was deferential in the few phrases that I heard. "Yes, sir, it's a highly secret matter. Would you warn your man and the doctor that this comes under the Official Secrets Act?"

He hung up, and sank into an armchair. "Sit down, Armitage, and permit me to refresh my memory with a few more questions while we wait for the police to arrive. Cigarette?"

I lit one of my own, and he cast about for an ashtray. He picked one up and put it on the arm of my chair. Suddenly he froze. I followed his gaze. There was a little ash in the bottom of the bowl. Two cigarettes, one stained with lipstick. And a matchstick, broken half-through in five places, and bent in the form of a circle.

"How did that get there?" His tone was sharp.

"I don't know. It's a broken matchstick exactly like the one last night. Bertil—I told you."

"Yes. I know. I was wondering whether you managed to flick the matchstick there when I was on the telephone."

It was said slowly, deliberately; and suddenly I had my first suspicion of the direction his thoughts were taking. "Don't be so damn silly. Anyway, I don't use matches; I use a lighter. And you can search me to prove it!"

"I may have to, later. Tell me, Armitage, when your brother telephoned yesterday, did he say where he was speaking from?"

I didn't ask him."

"Did you arrange to see the girl, Lydia, again?"

"Why should I? I only had to collect something from her for my brother. And, anyway, how do you know *that* wasn't Lydia in the cupboard?"

"From your reaction, Armitage. If it had been she, I think you would have shown it. By the way, you must have been pretty late home last night. Let yourself in with your key, I suppose, and didn't disturb your mother?"

"That's right."

"So nobody saw you come in?"

"No."

"And you cannot prove what time you got home?"

"No."

He shifted in his chair. "Clothes. They can be very interesting."

"Can they?"

"In two people of the same height and build. May I look at your jacket, Armitage?"

I took it off and gave it to him. He examined it inside and out, and asked if he could keep it for a day or two. I said I didn't see how I could stop him. Then he switched again. "Which drawer does Mrs. Armitage keep her stockings in?"

"Third on the right of her dressing-table, I imagine."

"Why?"

"Because I noticed it when we were in there. I didn't want to look at—the other thing. I saw a drawer just a bit open, and the top of a stocking showing out of it. I'm not a bloody fool!" It had become a desperate defence now, the warding off of the final question.

It came with sudden brutality. "Which side of the bed do *you* sleep on, Mr. Armitage?"

"What bed? I don't understand you."

"That bed—in *there*." He made a sweeping gesture behind him.

"Sleep? I've told you a hundred times I've never been in the place before."

"I think you have, Mr. Armitage. Often. I think you live here."

"But that's ridiculous. My brother—"

He cut in softly, almost purring, like a cat by the fire. "I think you *are* your brother, Mr. Armitage. I think you are Paul, not Hugh. And you have thought up this ingenious way of getting yourself out of a very nasty situation."

It was a long moment before the Colonel spoke again. "You've been clever, but just a shade too clever," the Colonel was saying. "You are Paul, who has been selling secrets—your country's secrets that you have sworn to protect. Perhaps something happened to make you scared. Perhaps that poor dead girl in there threatened to expose you. You silenced her for good and came to us with that cock-and-bull story about last night. You pretended to be your brother—not only to close the book but to get yourself a halo as an honest patriotic citizen. Paul Armitage does not exist any more. Paul becomes Hugh . . ."

There was a ridiculous logic in it. There was also a big flaw.

"If I am Paul, where is Hugh?"

His smile was unpleasant. "But of course you've fixed that, too. Hugh will be found soon. It will probably look like suicide."

The man meant it. Every word of it. And I realised the danger of my own position. I had to answer him with facts, with reasoning.

"Look," I said, "you are completely wrong and I can prove it.

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For a start, I was in hospital all the morning until I phoned you, and you can check that. First I was at a lecture and then in the lab. How could Paul, knowing nothing of medicine, have impersonated me there?"

"Can you prove where you were last night?"

"No, I suppose not."

"I am sure you can't. This Bertil you never really saw. This Lydia whose surname you don't know, who disappears conveniently into the darkness at Marble Arch. This house you went to with no clue as to where it really is. Not very convincing, is it?"

"You haven't answered my question, Colonel."

He pulled a pipe out of his pocket and sucked at it, unlit. "It's quite simple. You and your brother were very close. Hugh would have talked a lot about his work; you could have picked up some of the jargon. You would know what classes he attended, and that a list of lectures is usually posted in the hospital entrance hall. All you had to do was pick the right one, sign in—when I questioned you, you even told me you could imitate his handwriting; and that will apply to the 'suicide' note we may find later—"

I sat smoking furiously and thinking hard.

Benson came back into the room, declaring, "Nothing much. Found a letter to her from Exmouth—that should identify her."

"Mm . . ." The Colonel turned to him. "By the way, Benson, which drawer did she keep her stockings in?"

"Third on the right of her dressing-table. It was open. Why?"

"Oh, nothing." The Colonel did not look at me.

The doorbell interrupted his reverie. A police inspector and a doctor came in and went about their efficient business while I sat on in silence. I had ceased to exist.

A brief consultation took place between the Colonel and the inspector. "It's the passport I'm most interested in finding," the Colonel said.

Eventually the doctor returned, wiping his hands on a towel. "Asphyxia," he said. "Strangulation with a nylon stocking. Hard to fix time of death—I should think twenty, twenty-two hours at the outside."

They still ignored me completely, and suddenly I decided that I'd had enough. I probably knew as much about asphyxia as this pompous little doctor. Anyway, I had made up my mind now to take my own line and show them where they got off. The abruptness of my interruption startled them. "Do you mind," I said, "if I change?" They stared. "Change into my brother's clothes."

The doctor looked surprised, Benson and the inspector were silent. The Colonel nodded. I went into the bedroom and put on a tweed suit of Paul's.

In one of the side pockets I felt a small, hard, heavy object. I knew then that luck was with me; that I had found something which would help me prove my own identity and maybe help me to find Paul, too. It was my father's gold signet ring, which he had left to Paul and which my brother usually wore.

I took my own trousers back into the other room and placed them carefully on my jacket, which the Colonel had already appropriated. I squared my shoulders, turned to the Colonel and said, " Will you give me a chance, *now*, to prove I am what I say I am; perhaps to find out all that's happened? "

" Mm . . . It had better be convincing."

" It will be. I intend to telephone my mother. She'll be expecting me home soon. I'll explain I'm bringing a friend back from the hospital for a quick meal. You come with me and watch her reaction to this suit—and to this." I took the ring from the pocket and slipped it on my finger.

" I'm prepared to give you every chance," said the Colonel.

I telephoned my mother, and the Colonel listened while I spoke to her, giving the explanation I had said I would use.

As we turned to go, the Colonel called over his shoulder to Benson, " No sign of the passport anywhere yet? "

" No, sir. And I can't see anything of interest in his desk except some old maps."

He stretched an arm to pick up the maps, and the violence of my voice came as a shock even to me. " Don't touch them! " They all stared at me, and I said it more quietly but firmly. " It may sound crazy, but I can explain; and I may be able to find out something from them—but it will all be useless if anyone else has touched them."

The Colonel looked at me, wondering what lunatic trick I was up to now. I knew it would sound unbelievable to him; but I had to try. " You won't understand," I said, " I can't explain it myself, but I have a strange gift. Call it dowsing, if you like."

" Dowsing? We're not looking for water! "

" No—but a dowser can find other things: metal, people—from maps."

" I don't believe it," said Benson.

To my surprise the police inspector interrupted him. " There can be something in it, Colonel. The French Sûreté use a chap in missing-persons cases, and he traces people by dowsing over maps. I didn't believe it myself till I saw him in action. He had to have something belonging to the missing person, which he held as a sort of pendulum over a map—and it worked! "

" That's exactly it," I said. " I have my brother's signet ring here that he almost always wore. And with us particularly, the dowsing is bound to show something because we are so close—identical twins and all that. You can't find his passport, which indicates he might have gone abroad. Well, if he has—and if nobody touches those maps to break the contact—I might, I just might get an inkling of where he is."

The Colonel was sucking his empty pipe, which by now was to me a barometer indicating disbelief. " Far be it from me to quarrel with the inspector's experience, but so far as you are concerned, Armitage, I don't believe a word."

" You can lose nothing by letting me try."

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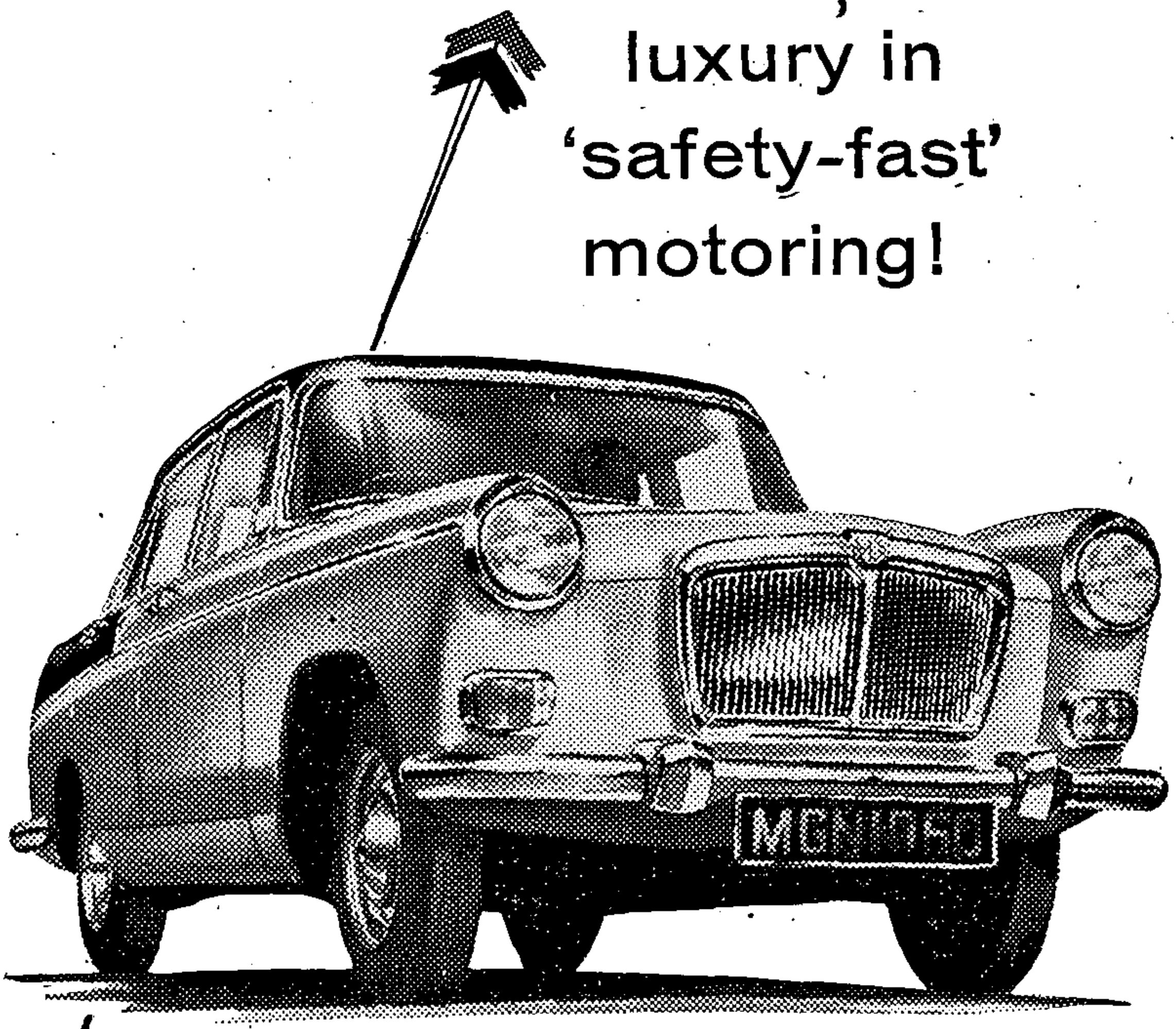

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"Mm. First you have to prove your identity. We'll see your mother. If you can satisfy me—completely—on that point, I don't mind letting you play with your maps. All right?"

I leaned across Benson to pick up the maps and carefully put them in my pocket. They were old dog-eared Michelins that my brother and I had used on continental cycling holidays, and they covered most of France and Germany.

The Colonel gave a last look at Benson. "Don't forget to change the lock to our Number 6. I've a key on me for that."

As we walked down the corridor, I asked why he bothered to have the lock changed. "So that we can get back in—and the porter can't."

"What will you want to come back for?"

He gave me a sidelong glance. "You may be coming back yourself."

At home, in St. John's Wood, I introduced the Colonel as Professor Watson from the hospital. Mother switched off the television and said, "How nice of you, Hugh, to come so quickly after telephoning . . ."

She suddenly stopped, turned, and stared at me. "Hugh! You're wearing one of Paul's jackets."

I said, "Yes, Mother, he gave it to me." I forced myself not to look at the Colonel.

Mother's hand went to her mouth. "Gave it to you? When? Have you seen him today?"

"No—he gave it to me last Sunday."

"You didn't tell me you'd been to his flat."

"I haven't. He dropped it in when he came here."

"Well, I haven't seen it in your cupboard. And you certainly weren't wearing it at breakfast this morning."

"I was."

"If you were wearing Paul's jacket and I didn't notice it, Hugh, then I must be getting very old and blind—that's all I can say." And she swept out to the kitchen to get the meal.

I showed the Colonel a photograph on the mantelpiece—of Paul and me side by side. "Your mother is a very worried woman," he said.

"I know. And I'm afraid I've got to increase her worries if I'm to convince you. She hasn't seen Paul's signet ring yet."

The meal was over and we had got to the coffee stage when my mother broke off, with her cup halfway to her lips, "Why are you wearing Paul's ring?"

"I—er—well, he lent it to me. I didn't think you'd mind."

"I don't mind *you* wearing it, Hugh. But I don't think Paul should have done it. I know he's always so careless with his things, but after all, your father left the ring to him; you had the watch."

She rose rather quickly and went out to the kitchen. I took off my wristwatch and showed the Colonel the inscription on the back: *V.A. from M.A.*, 1945.

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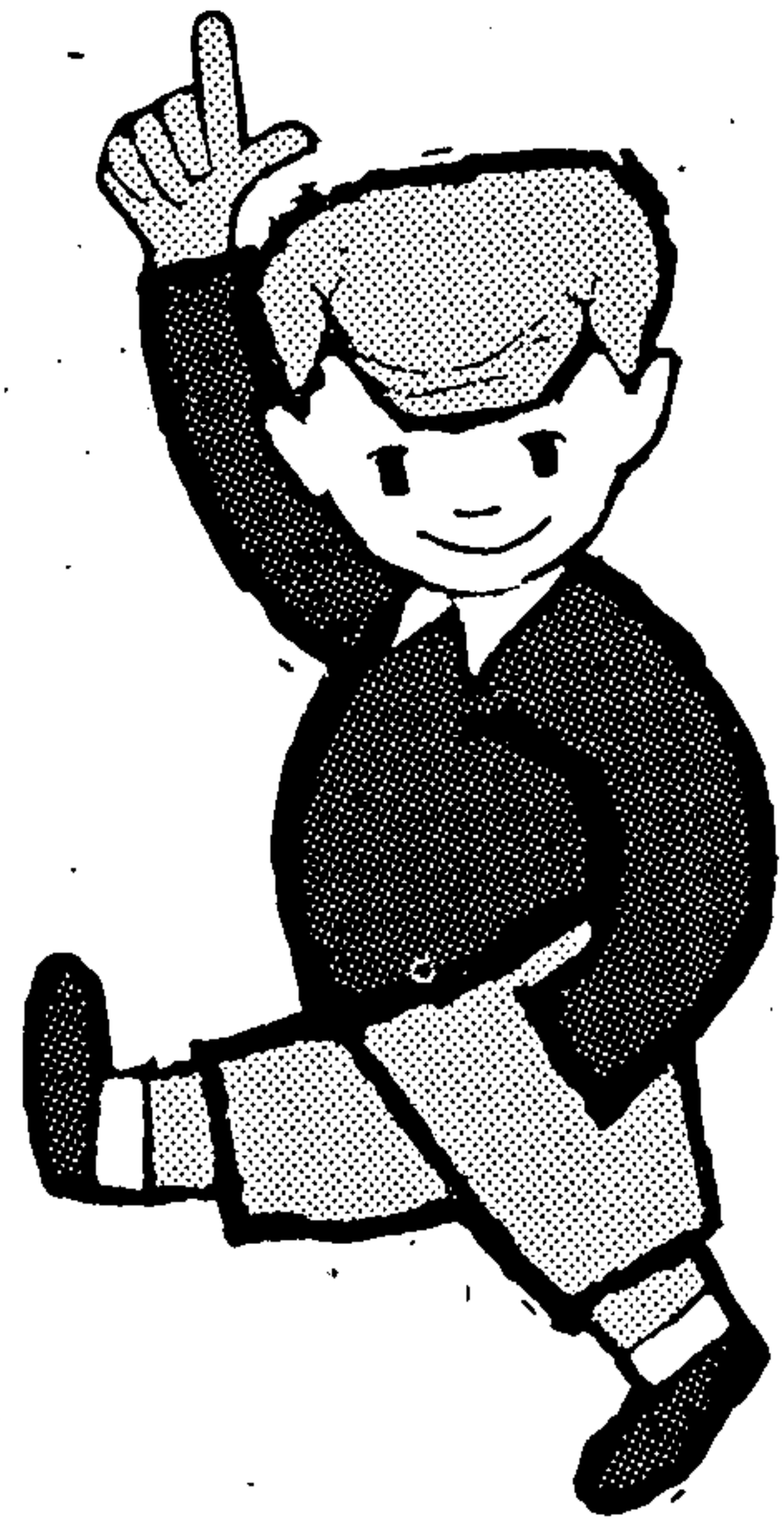

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I could see the Colonel's disbelief weakening, and I felt a surge of confidence. I was on top. "There's one last thing that will convince you," I said. "I'm a medical student in my fourth year; Paul knows nothing about medicine. Come upstairs and dive into my textbooks. You can ask me any questions you like. I guarantee I'll know answers that could not possibly be mugged up by anyone except a medical student."

As we went past the kitchen on the way to my room, I slipped in and kissed my mother lightly as she stood there. "Don't worry," I murmured . . .

I passed the Colonel's test. It was the most gruelling oral exam I had ever had, and I passed it. The Colonel made it as difficult as he could, leafing through Gray's *Anatomy* and firing mispronounced questions at me; but when he couldn't trip me at the end, even on the Bloodless Fold of Treves and the Foramen of Monro, I heard the heavy volume close with a snap and his voice came quietly. "All right, I believe you, Mr. Hugh Armitage. Your brother couldn't have passed that test. But where is he?"

I said, "I can believe—just—that he might do the first thing, sell information. It's easy to be wise after the event; and now, looking back, I can remember so many small things when we were younger; the weakness in him when he wanted something; the always-wanting-something. If he was really pushed for money, and someone offered him an easy way out, something that he could rationalise, pretending that the information wasn't really secret, and so on, I can see that Paul might give way. But not the other: not murder."

"Weak people can be vicious when they are frightened."

"Yes, but my brother couldn't have killed that girl. And remember the broken match in the flat. If, as you say, you now believe me, you must believe what I say about Bertil. He left his mark in my brother's flat."

"And you think Bertil killed the girl? Why should he?"

"To make Paul more frightened. To make him run away. With all the rest that would come out, it would damn him."

The Colonel pulled at his pipe, and I was silent for a moment—I knew the pattern. "You see," I said, "Paul was desperately worried. Even I could feel that, and *they* must have known it, too. They must have suspected he was preparing to bolt in one of two ways: Queen's evidence, or behind the Iron Curtain. They couldn't risk the first, and they had to make certain he went their way. So they planted this murder on him. Then he would have to flee—to them. *Out of reach of the law, and out of your reach for good.*"

The Colonel sounded noncommittal. "I think you have something there, Armitage. It's plausible. But once they find your brother has gone without their permission to an unknown destination, the whole of your theory falls down."

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I impersonated Paul with Bertil. So far as they know, Paul is still around."

He said, "That's quite an amusing idea," and sat, deep in thought.

I turned to stare out of the window. It had been raining, a quick summer shower, and the street shone black in the lamplight. I said, "Paul didn't commit that murder. I know it. I'm going to find him and prove it."

For the first time that night, he smiled. "You may have to. You may have to take his place."

I drew a slow breath and my mind raced. Of course!. That was it. Obvious, and simple, and dangerous—but the way to find Paul. I had impersonated him before and I could—I would—do it again. I would *be* Paul: in his flat, in his job, in every way, until they contacted me. And perhaps Lydia, too . . .

The Colonel was saying, "I'm not concerned with murder. That's for the police. But I am vitally interested in the other matter. I want to stop a security leak that could cause the deaths of countless people. I want to get to him, and through him at those he serves. I can make no promises; but if you co-operate, and we get results, his case may well be reviewed here with sympathy."

"I'll find my brother if it takes me a lifetime!"

"It'll have to be quicker than that," he said cynically. "It's essential to keep the press out of this. Let the newspapers start a hue and cry, and our friends will go to earth so fast and deep that we'll never find them. Your brother, too. It's impossible to keep a murder out of the papers for long. With the help of the Yard and the Home Office, I can keep it quiet for a time; but soon her family, friends, people in the flats—will talk. I should say you have two weeks at the outside. With luck, that is."

I pulled the maps from my pocket and slapped them on my desk. "Well, what are we waiting for?" I asked. "I know you're sceptical about this dowsing business, but I'll prove it to you."

From the drawer I took my pendulum—an ebony hollow sphere that unscrewed in two halves, suspended at the top by a thread. I took off Paul's ring and put it as far away from the maps as possible. I held the pendulum thread in my right hand; my left hand was under a map of the southern counties; and the pendulum was suspended over it. Soon, without any movement of my right hand, the pendulum began a circular motion, the arc getting wider and wider.

"I'll show you my polarity," I said. "You see, the pendulum is swinging clockwise. Once I experimented with Paul, because I don't think there's been any research on this dowsing phenomenon with identical twins. As you might expect, he is the mirror: his goes the other way—anticlockwise. But you'll have to take my word for that."

The Colonel wanted to try. He did, and nothing happened.

Then I held his free hand; and the slow clockwise circular motion began.

"Extraordinary," he said. "I can see it happening, but I don't believe it!"

"I believe it—but I can't explain. Nobody can."

Then, under his surprised eyes, I got to work in earnest. I screwed Paul's signet ring into the hollow between the two halves of the pendulum sphere and suspended it over the West London area of the map. The pendulum thread seemed to twitch for an instant; then it started swinging, anticlockwise, in an ever-increasing arc.

"Good God," said the Colonel.

I tried the area of the rocket research establishment. Nothing.

"Try over all the roads out of London to ports and airfields," said the Colonel. "If he's taken his passport, he's probably on his way abroad."

Motionless, the pendulum hung over the roads radiating from the hub of the capital. Southampton, Newhaven, Dover—nothing. Then over Chelmsford a faint reaction. Stronger at Ipswich. And at Harwich the pendulum swung in a steady, widening circle.

"He's there—or has been very recently," I murmured.

"Harwich; that's Denmark via Esbjerg; Holland by way of Antwerp, Hook of Holland, or Amsterdam. I'll get a watch put on Harwich—though he's probably on the other side by now."

I folded the map. Suddenly, after the concentration of the last minutes, I was very tired. "I promise you I'll get more information when he's reached some place on the other side. At least the direction in which he's going."

"I'm afraid we can guess that," said the Colonel. "But there's no harm in trying later. First, however, I think we'll have to take your mother into our confidence—up to a point. Can't risk a leakage."

I stopped. "I suppose so. But keep the murder out of it, at least for the time being. You're going to give her a tremendous shock, you know."

The Colonel agreed, and we went downstairs where my mother was sewing. I told her he was from the Special Branch and wanted to talk to her because Paul was in trouble. She put down her needle and said, "*I know he's in trouble. I knew when he came to see me this morning.*"

"*This morning?*"

"Yes, after you had left for the hospital. He asked me to lend him some money. Quite a lot. I could see he was desperately anxious, but he wouldn't tell me what it was for." She made a little deprecating gesture to the Colonel. "Paul's always been like that—rather secretive, hates being questioned. But he is my son."

She told us that she had given him an open cheque for £300; then she looked steadily at the Colonel and said, "Now tell me exactly what he has done."

And so the Colonel told her simply, gently, leaving out only the murder.

I took her hand. "I'm going to find him, Mother. I must."

She hardly seemed to hear me. "I knew it was very serious when he arrived here. More serious when those two telephone calls came for him this afternoon."

The Colonel interrupted quietly. "*Two* calls, Mrs. Armitage? I told you that our man made a routine check at about six o'clock. When was the other?"

"About four. He was very polite, though his voice was a bit clipped. He just said he had phoned Paul at work and he wasn't there, and the man wondered if he was here. I said no, and he thanked me and rang off."

I breathed the word, "Bertil."

"Of course," said the Colonel. "But more interesting is the fact that if he knew Paul was not at work, he must have had a message from someone in the place. There must be another contact inside."

Everything seemed to move faster after that. The Colonel explained what I must do, and how my mother must be my cover at home, telling the hospital that I was ill, and so on. He ordered me to start the impersonation that night, returning to sleep in Paul's flat—"Don't worry—they'll have made the bed!"—and taking none of my own things except my passport. He gave me a key to the changed lock, and a bundle of five-pound notes for expenses—and I wondered vaguely if they were the ones from Bertil's white envelope.

An hour later I was turning the key in the Colonel's Number 6 lock on the door of Paul's flat.

It was empty, lonely, sad. No sound except the tick and creak of the waterpipes. No physical memory but the faint, dead fragrance of someone who had lived there. There was no sign of what had happened. Except to me. I knew; and I could guess the desperation that must have hung in the room in those last moments between a man and a girl when no one could help them.

I went to bed in the silent room and fell quickly asleep. But it was a bad sleep, tortured by dreams. There was one dream in particular from which I could not escape. I was in some place that I had never known. Rain was falling, a soft drizzle that numbed; and in the rain was a massed shadow—a ruin of some kind. The blind eyes of the windows showed up as empty spaces against the glare of lights from far off. There were piles of rubble and fallen masonry in front of me, and I had to get over them to reach something. There was something I *must* find.

And there was something behind me, following, as I gripped at the ragged wet edges of the stone; something that whispered and scurried furtively at every step I made. I was frightened; but more frightened of what lay ahead. And then, just as I was reaching that gaunt, bare wall, it started to sway, to fall. There was no noise; that was the worst of it. Just the feel of the rain, and the terror unrolling like a silent film. I woke sweating, shouting, to the sound of the telephone.

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It was the Colonel, apparently bright and cheerful.

" Be ready to leave at nine o'clock," he said. " A car will call for you at the front entrance, and I shall be in it. We'll try to brief you as far as we can on the way to the research station. Remember to wear Paul's clothes."

I said, " O.K. I'm not sure about the shoes, but I'll try," and he rang off. While I was making myself a cup of tea and some toast in the tiny kitchen, I wondered who " we " might be.

I went downstairs, and the porter came out and wished me good morning. I had the sense to tell him that the car had broken down and I was waiting for a lift. I stood there, Paul's shoes not quite comfortable, with the signet ring on my finger, his clothes fitting easily, wondering where he was now, whether they had caught him at the port or on the other side.

But whatever they did or said, I was going to have another try with those maps on my own.

A black chauffeur-driven saloon came purring round the corner and drew up at the kerb. The back door swung open and I could see the Colonel sitting inside, next to another man, a stranger.

" Get in."

That was all, and then the door was shut and I was wedged in between them. The partition between the driver and the back was wound up and we set off, heading west.

There was silence for a moment as the stranger, a big man with a mass of snow-white, crisp hair, a bold nose, and a craggy, intelligent face, turned to stare at me. I returned the gaze, thinking how much he reminded me of the lions in Trafalgar Square. Then he said, " Remarkable! Quite remarkable! I can't quite believe it. He's the split image! "

" Your brother's boss at the research station, Mr. Armitage." It was the Colonel's voice coming from the other side. " Sir John Hallet—Mr. *Hugh* Armitage."

I said, " Good morning," and the big man continued to stare as the Colonel talked to me.

" Found out a couple of things," he said abruptly. " That girl who was murdered—she'd been living in the flat for quite a time; almost since your brother moved in. And I got your mother's bank manager out of bed. Your brother cashed the cheque she gave him yesterday morning. He took £100 in travellers' cheques —produced his passport—and the rest in fivers."

" That's all very interesting," I said, " but what I want to know is the next move for me. Now."

" Well," said the Colonel, " it's quite obvious that you could not bluff enough rocket jargon to take your brother's place at the research station. But we know Paul had a contact there; and it is essential for us to trigger that off."

" How? "

" We've let the word seep round this morning that Paul has suddenly been posted to a similar job in the North. All you—Paul —are going back for now is to say a few good-byes and to collect

your kit. *They* daren't let you get out of touch without some word. I'm pretty sure the contact will make a move."

"What sort of move?"

"That you will discover."

"I'm to be the bait?"

"Precisely."

We drove through the two barriers of electrified wire which protected the rocket station, past the radiating blast walls to the heart of the establishment, where I was vetted by the Director and his Chief Security Officer.

These were the only two taken into the Colonel's confidence. And now I stood outside Hut 18; in my hand, the key to its locked door and another key which would open my brother's locker. My heart raced; I took three deep breaths to steady my tightened nerves. Inside, I had been told, was a Canadian scientist named Crosbie, with whom Paul worked. He would be the first test of my bluff. This was it. I squared my shoulders, turned the key in the lock, and stepped inside.

Crosbie was sitting at one of the two desks under the steel-meshed windows. He looked up: a lean and intelligent face. His eyes, through thick-rimmed spectacles, were not friendly. "Hullo, Paul. Hear you're leaving us."

"Yes. Bunged up North. I've wangled a week's leave first." I had unlocked the cabinet marked, *Armitage, P.*, and was stacking the contents—some papers, a couple of pipes, a lot of betting slips.

"Well, it's been nice working with you, as they say."

That was not what he meant, and the tone belied his words. I did not answer, and he went on, "Shall we square up?"

"Square up what?"

"Come off it, Paul! That fiver."

So that was it! I mumbled suitable apologies and gave him one of the Colonel's notes. "Are you going to see Holrode and Beeston before you go?"

"I shouldn't think so."

"In that case, don't you think it might be a nice gesture if you left with me the fiver apiece you touched them for?"

I laughed aloud, "Fair enough!" and paid up. Suddenly the tension left the little room. He pulled my leg about slow horses and fast women, and I told him it was a lovely road to ruin.

The sound of a buzzer at the door interrupted us. Crosbie looked at his watch. "Fanny! Let her in, will you, old man? I could do with a cup of tea."

I opened the door and was confronted by an ageing female with a figure as broad as it was long, and mercifully covered with a white overall. Beady eyes looked at me from under a badly-rolled turban from which strands of ginger hair escaped.

"'Ullo, Mr. Armitage, dear. I 'ear you're leaving us."

"Yes, Fanny."

She pushed a trolley laden with jangling cups and saucers past me into the room. "'Ullo, Mr. Crosbie. Same as usual?"

"Please, Fanny."

She bent down to her tea urn, chattering in the voice of a thirsty frog while she poured. "Going far, Mr. Armitage?"

"Up North, Fanny."

"Bit sudden, isn't it?"

"Yes; I've got a week's leave first."

"Ar . . . Well, you'd better settle up with me, ducks. A pity you weren't in yesterday, I 'ad a winner for you at Kempton."

"How much do I owe you, Fanny?"

She thought for a moment. "Two and nine, teas and coffees. Ten bob for that bet you had Monday. And what you fancy now."

"Just a cup of tea, please." I held out a pound. "You can keep the change."

"What! No cake? And I've gone and saved one of yer favourites." The voice was compelling.

"No thanks. I'm not hungry."

"Go on. I kept it for you special. You always 'ave yer cake. . ." She pointed down at a square mauve-iced monstrosity in a paper cup on the corner of her tray, but her eyes were still on mine. Sómething seemed to spark in them for a second.

"All right, Fanny. Just that and a cup of tea."

She put both carefully on the desk, wiped her hands on her apron, and turned her trolley. "Well, enjoy yourself," she said. "Don't forget old Fanny. And if you can't be good, be careful."

With a clatter of crockery and a slam of the door, she was gone.

I took the iced monstrosity, and was about to crumple the paper container that had nursed the cake, when I stayed my hand. There were faint marks on the greasy white surface.

I glanced at Crosbie, but he was once again absorbed at his desk. I held the container up to the light. In a round, uneducated hand were pencilled four words, *Ring Bertil urgent tonight.*

Nothing else happened. I collected Paul's kit, made a few perfunctory farewells, and reported to the Director for my lift home.

The flat seemed even more cold and lonely than it had the night before. I locked the door and wandered from room to room, uncertain what to do. I mixed myself a drink from Paul's cocktail cabinet, then nerved myself to ring the Colonel and tell him what had happened.

He answered the phone himself, quickly, perhaps too quickly, if I had thought about it. He heard me out in silence, and said, "There's no proof that the old hag wrote it; but we'll put tabs on her, get a handwriting sample, and so on. Actually, she'd be ideal for them, shoving that tea trolley all round the place, and being a bookie's runner as well. She's probably allowed to use an outside phone, too, unofficially. They could have worked out a code based on your brother's bets. Yes, an effective little set-up."

"But," I said, "it doesn't get us much further. I'm to ring Bertil; but I don't know his number."

"All the better." The Colonel sounded almost cheerful. "You don't ring Bertil, so he gets cross; perhaps a bit worried. And then he comes after you. Splendid!"

"And I wait here at the flat until that happens?"

"That's right, old man."

And so I waited. To ease the dragging time, I again tried dowsing over the maps with my pendulum loaded with my brother's signet ring. There was no response over Holland, none over France or Western Germany. Then as the pendulum approached Berlin it began, very slightly, to move.

In my start of excitement the pendulum slipped from my hand to the carpet, and as I knelt to retrieve it the doorbell rang.

A single, sharp sound that cut across the silence and my thoughts almost like a physical blow. © Christopher Landon 1960

★ ***The second part of The Mirror Room by Christopher Landon appears in next month's Argosy on sale April 8***

SOLUTIONS to THE DEADLY SEX on page 28

1. *Heroine of several books by H. Rider Haggard. Her other name was Ayesha.*
2. *a. In 1918; b. We aren't saying! c. Nancy Astor (Viscountess Astor, C.H.).*
3. *a. Sir Walter Scott; b. Kate O'Brien; c. Alberto Moravia.*
4. *a. Boadicea; b. Queen Anne; c. Queen Victoria.*
5. *To the Dame, if one is a native of Sark.*
6. *a. The King of Ruritania's intended, in The Prisoner of Zenda; b. She gave a helping hand to Bonnie Prince Charlie; c. Daughter of Soames Forsyte in Galsworthy's Forsyte Saga.*
7. *a. Vladimir Nabokov in the much-talked-of Lolita; b. Maurice Chevalier.*
8. *Kipling said it, and Argosy is reserving judgment.*
9. *a. Shakespeare; b. Thomas Gray; c. Alexandre Dumas, père; d. Oliver Goldsmith.*

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Campaigner.* 6, *Acts.* 9, *Manuscript.* 10, *Anna.* 12, *A stately home.* 15, *Abusive.* 16, *Slobber.* 17, *Soprano.* 19, *Inhaled.* 20, *Presentiment.* 23, *Also.* 24, *Rectorship.* 25, *Serf.* 26, *Crustacean.*

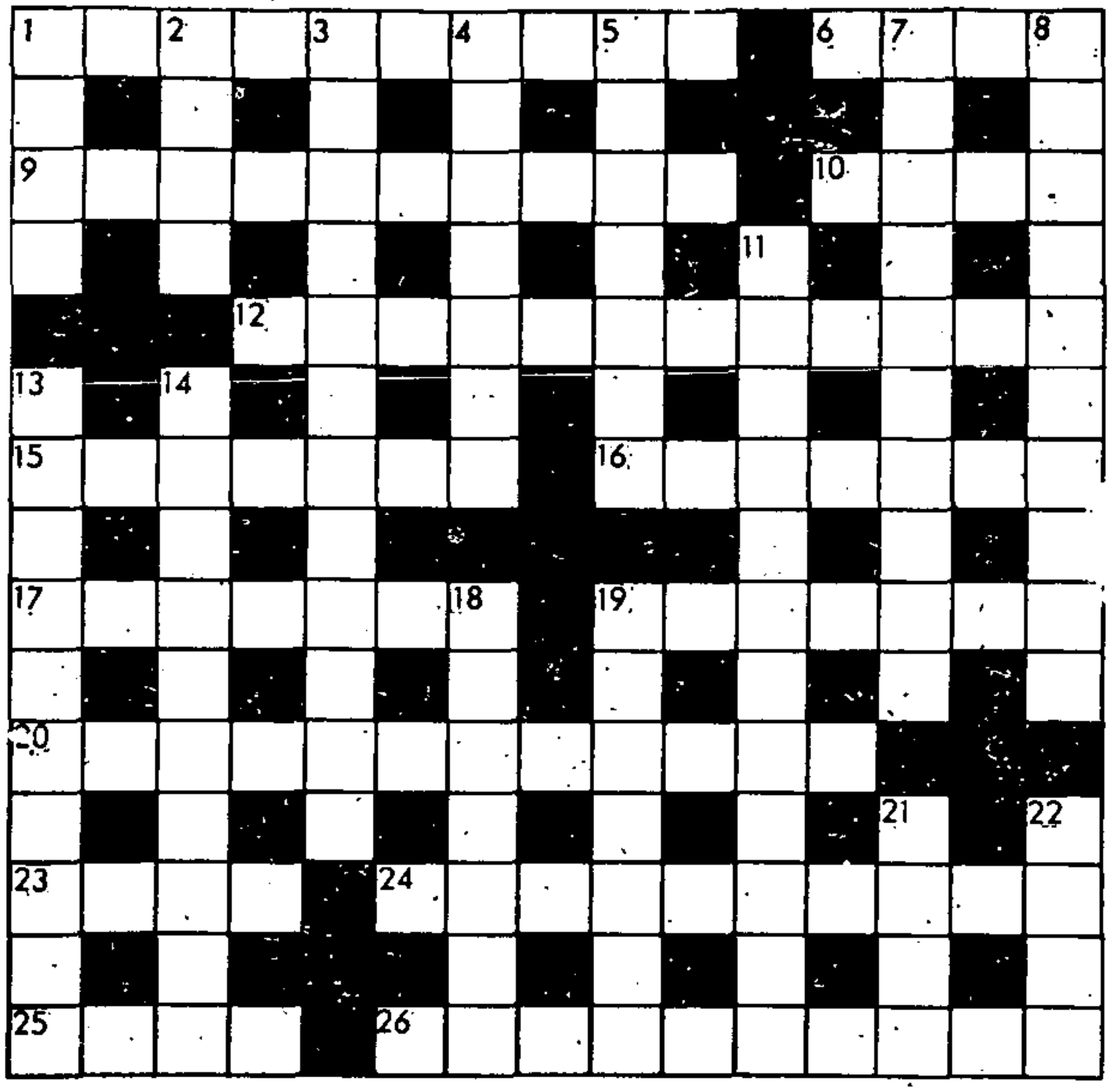
Down. 1, *Comb.* 2, *Mine.* 3, *Assassinated.* 4, *Garbage.* 5, *Express.* 7, *Cannon-ball.* 8, *Slave trade.* 11, *Hypochondria.* 13, *Marsupials.* 14, *Suppressor.* 18, *Outwear.* 19, *Inmates.* 21, *Ghee.* 22, *Spin.*

ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 143

★



CLUES

Across

1 A camper with mixed gin in him is a veteran (10).

6 Of the Apostles, for instance (4).

9 We're after the man in the document (10).

10 Girl of the Five Towns (4).

12 Where the nobs rake in bobs ? (1, 7, 4).

15 In a bus I've met such conductors (7).

16 Weeper drivels even when given a pound (7).

17 Soak the artist ? No, the singer (7).

19 Breathed in Falstaff's prince ? (7).

20 Warning—of the future, paradoxically (12).

23 He ran ! (4).

24 Clerical post sounds like holy vessel (10).

25 King Edward deep in sf ? A slave to it ! (4).

26 Crab holds rust and broken cane (10).

Down

1 Medical officer ? No, toothy type (4).

2 The bomb belongs to me (4).

3 Murdered with two donkeys and a small bear (12).

4 Refuse a bee in the garage (7).

5 From the printers, with haste (7).

7 An artillery dance ? (6-4).

8 Commerce in 25 (5, 5).

11 Phony rich ado about imaginary illness (12).

13 Pouched Ma's abound in Australia (10).

14 Quasher—P.S., or purses (10).

18 Avoid this and welcome (7).

19 Inside, chaps, to see the denizens (7).

21 Buffalo butter in tough eels (4).

22 Nips up for a turn (4).

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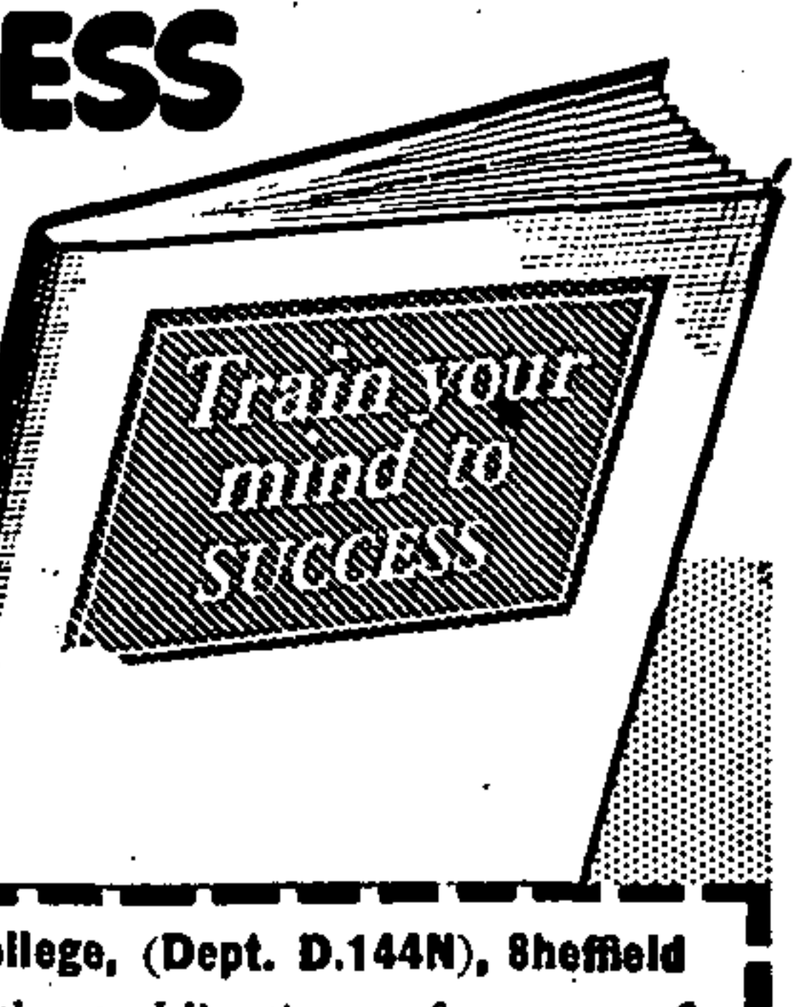

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